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THE

WHITE CHURCH

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THE WHITE CHURCH.*

CHAPTER I.

RISING BRANCH.

It was a sultry afternoon in August. Not a cloud shut off the rays of the sun. The cricket sang in the fencerows; and the homeless bumble bee, whose nest in the stubble had been turned under by the plow, buzzed aimlessly through the air. Now and then the hum of a threshing-machine could be heard afar off. All things wore an after-harvest look. Ricks of straw stood like brown giants in the barnyards or solitary in the midst of reaped fields. The dust lay thick in the roads, and covered the lowest rails so deep that the harmless garter-snake left a trail when she crept through.

The little stream called Rising Branch, from which the whole neighborhood took its name, was nearly dry. Below the mill-dam, at the foot of Craggy Hill, it was a mere thread of water running in a narrow gully, whose edges were tramped to a thick mud by cattle.

There was but little need of the rude bridge over which old Joe Sales was riding on his way to the village. His bridle was thrown loosely on the neck

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of his old gray horse, which walked leisurely along with head down, while the master, with both hands buried deep in the pockets of his baggy trousers, seemed in a deep study.

"How d' ye do, Uncle Joe?" shouted a barefooted urchin who had come out of a stubble-field just ahead, and was perched upon a rail-fence.

"How are ye, Sandy?" answered the old man without stopping his horse. "Where is yer father?"

"Ter town," replied the lad, waving his hand in the direction of the village. The old man's eyes fell to the ground again, and he passed on. The boy sat watching him for awhile, and then, dropping to the ground, scampered back upon the road.

"Uncle Joe, Uncle Joe," muttered the old man to himself. "I am Uncle Joe to pretty nigh every body, and ef the Lord spares me I 'll be more than a Uncle Joe to this neighborhood yet."

The old man uttered this remark with the sense of one who has a profound thought at heart. A casual observer might have detected a gleam of inspiration in the smile that played on his wrinkled face; but with the ejaculation "Well!" accompanied with a sigh, he uttered no further sound until he reached a house at the edge of a village. This house, a long and narrow one, was of the variety known in that neighborhood as "cast and plaster." It was built of logs and covered on the outside with coarse mortar, then whitewashed. Its side faced the road, and creeping vines almost covered a low porch that extended the entire length.

While Uncle Joe, for so we shall now call him, was hitching his horse, a woman appeared at the gate. She was apparently in middle life. Her black hair was

combed back from a high forehead. Her eyes, though as black as her hair, were very mild. Around her mouth a few faint wrinkles were visible, suggesting that her life had not been all sunshine. She was clad in a plain alpaca, a little rusty for the wear, but perfectly clean.

The widow reached out her hand to meet Uncle Joe's, who replied to her salutation with: "Well es usual, Sister Conway, 'ceptin' a little tech of rheumatiz thet I felt after diggin' that ditch twixt me and Elder Tribbey. It war hard and dry enough till we came to the swamp, and there it war wet in spite o' the drouth we're hevin'."

Uncle Joe had reached the porch, where a girl, the likeness of her mother, set for him a chair. He took off his hat, placed it on the porch beside him, wiped his bald head and continued to speak:

"I thought I would stop in a spell, fur I heerd as how your Jake war over to Hanaford yesterday, and I allowed he had some news of the new railroad. Sandy Warner told me yesterday thet it war a settled thing, but all I could get out of him was that he heerd 'em say so up at the blacksmith shop."

"I guess Sandy is right, Uncle Joe," replied the widow. "Jacob learned over at Hanaford that the subscription books were closed there, and you know that sufficient stock was taken at Carterville, the other end of the line, in a few months after the project was started. The village here is just half-way, and Mr. Sarcott says it will be an important station."

"I heerd he war goin' to build a mill, if the road kem," said Uncle Joe.

"Yes, indeed, more than a mill, Uncle Joe," cried

a strapping boy who entered at this moment, "a grist-mill, a factory, and if the company can get the land, they may build some shops here, too." Jake sat down on a big chair, all out of breath.

"What kind of a factory es it a goin' to be, Jake?" asked the old man, slowly.

"A woolen factory, they say," replied Jake, "and that will bring people to Rising Branch and give the town a boom."

"Jake!" said Mrs. Conway, in a tone of reproof.

"Oh! I forgot a little, mother, that's all; these slang words will stick to a fellow so."

"Guess you larnt that over to Hanaford at the railroad, did n't ye, Jake?" remarked Uncle Joe slyly. Jake was silent, and in a moment the old man added: "That 's jest the kind of freight the railroad will bring in, Sister Conway, but that is n't sayin' as thet I 'm opposed to it. Curses likes to keep company with blessin's, even if blessin's do n't consent, and they both are allus found purty close together. We all want the road, but what I am in fur is to pervide agin the evils it 'll bring, and then we can enjoy its good."

Jake turned to the old man with a look of surprise, but before he could speak Mrs. Conway replied: "Why, Uncle Joe, you do n't think the road is going to be as bad a thing as that, do you?"

"I have n't said as thet it war a bad thing, Sister Conway," replied Uncle Joe. "I said that it war likely to bring evils, and we must prepare for 'em."

"Why, Uncle Joe, it is n't the cholera that 's a coming?" The speaker was Eurilda, the widow's daughter.

"Of course not, of course not, 'Rildy," and the

old man's eyes twinkled as he spoke; "but let me tell ye, child, that while cholery may kill the body, a growin' town is likely to develop evils that are worse, fur they kill the soul. I heerd Brother Scammon sayin' in a sermon down at the old meetin' house last Sunday that wherever ther' war soil, both weeds and flowers war sure to grow. He war a' quotin' it from some old poet, I believe. Anyhow it is so."

"So you believe that the railroad will improve the village soil, do you, Uncle Joe?" said the widow, smiling.

"Exactly so," said Uncle Joe, with great emphasis upon the first word, "and we must get the handles in our hoes to fight the weeds." No reply followed this last remark, and both Jake and Eurilda looked puzzled.

Uncle Joe paid no attention to their mute appeals for explanation, but continued to address himself to their mother.

"Sister Conway, I am thinkin' thet since this railroad matter hez taken sech a turn, an' is likely to be a sure thing, thet the question of buildin' our new church ought to be shook up a little livelier. A new house we 've got to have: the old one is nigh about past mendin'. Some of the brethren want to build on the old spot, seein' thet the buryin'-ground is there, but my choice hez allus been the village. The young folks is centered around here mostly, and we hev got to build fur them."

"Father's grave is there," exclaimed both Jake and Eurilda at once.

Mrs. Conway remained silent; a handkerchief was pressed to her face; and Uncle Joe knew full well

what memories his allusion to the old church had called up.

"I know, Sister Conway," continued he, "thet it seems kind o' sad to you to think o' movin' the old church. Bro. Conway were born into the kingdom inside its logs, one may say, and it war his home fur many a year. But will the new church benefit the dead? Won't they sleep as sound as they ever slept while the instrument of the Lord hez only taken its presence from them because it hez found a field ripe fur the harvest?"

The widow nodded assent, but could say nothing.

"Sister Conway," resumed the old man, "hev I not them thet I love lyin' in the old buryin'-ground? Isn't my Josie thar? He would a been a young man now. And where's my William that was drownded in the dam below Craggy Hill; to say nothin' of Susie, who war married long afore Jake here war born?"

"I know it, Uncle Joe," was all the widow could say.

Uncle Joe kept on. He grew more earnest. "But, Sister Conway, we need a church here at the village. We must build fur the livin'. Now's the time for us few Christians in the neighborhood to fix a center of influence thet will stand agin the evils of a growin' town. Risin' Branch village is goin' to grow, no doubt, and unless we who profess to foller the Master see to it, it 'll not grow very fur in grace."

Uncle Joe had arisen at the close of this remark, and had placed his hat on his head.

The widow's voice arrested the step he had taken toward the door.

"I know," she began in a voice that now betrayed

no emotion, "that there is force in what you say, Uncle Joe, and it was not wholly past sorrows that made me weep. My husband's grave is indeed at the old church, and it would seem strange to me to go to morning worship without pausing after it was over to look at the spot or to lay a flower there. I have reason enough to want the church here at the village." She glanced significantly at Jake and Eurilda. "But, Uncle Joe, I fear there will be something harder to overcome than the sentiments of some of the brethren."

Uncle Joe opened his eyes very wide. "Why, what, Sister Conway?"

"Mr. Sarcott!" calmly answered the widow.

"Sarcott, Sarcott," ejaculated Uncle Joe. "Why, I know thet he 's an infidel, an' it 's a pity."

"And he owns all the land for a half-mile around the village, except my little piece here," said Mrs. Conway, cutting off Uncle Joe's remark.

"Thet 's a fact, thet 's a fact," said the old man, half in reply and half to himself. He stood meditating for a moment, then said, "I 'm goin' to talk with James Sarcott myself, and thet before this day is past. Now it is gettin' toward evenin', and I will have to be a huntin' him up."

With a very decided air the old man started for the door. He strode rather than walked; as if he were making toward some object that had irritated him by trying to escape.

When he had gone, Jake said: "I do not see why Uncle Joe is afraid of the railroad's spoiling Rising Branch. One would think, to hear him talk, that there can be no enterprise without wickedness. Do you understand him, mother?"

Mrs. Conway replied: "I think I do, Jacob, and I think he speaks the truth. The godlessness of Rising Branch is a matter of remark even now; there has never been a church nearer to it than the one at Craggy Hill"—

"That is three miles away," interrupted Eurilda.

Mrs. Conway finished,—"and a greater activity in our village life without some restraining, or rather guiding, force may be no desirable boon."

"Mr. Sarcott never wanted a church here," said Eurilda.

"He won't sell any land for one now, I 'll bet," added Jake.

Mrs. Conway cast a look of reproof at the careless boy, who tried to turn it aside with: "Oh, I forgot again, mother."

His mother noticed the slang no further, but said: "People dislike the presence of standing rebukes to their ways of life, children."

Both Jake and his sister looked doubtful about the meaning of this remark, but their mother ventured no explanation.

In the meantime Uncle Joe Sales had reached the village store, in front of which he again hitched his horse and dismounted. Rising Branch village, to distinguish it from the neighborhood which bore the same name, was generally called the "village." It stood on a rise of land that sloped toward the stream before spoken of. The road crossed the stream again beyond the village by a bridge similar to that over which Uncle Joe had come.

At this point the railroad from Hanaford was to touch Rising Branch, and was to follow the course of

the stream down the valley to Carterville. A store, a blacksmith shop, and a half-dozen houses formed the nucleus around which was to grow a "big town" when the railroad came.

A general air of listlessness pervaded the place; the blacksmith shop was closed and the smith himself, a burly fellow in blue overalls, and with a great quid of tobacco in his mouth, sat on an empty sugar barrel in front of the store, eyeing the movements of Uncle Joe.

The latter paid back his nod of recognition with: "How d' ye do, Robert? Out o' work to-day?"

"Yes," said the smith, "I am out o' the old shop for awhile, too. I 'm goin' onto the road Monday. When we get the old smoker through here I won't have ter lay idle more nor half my time." The smith spoke this in a drawling tone that suggested that his compulsory idleness was not a grievous yoke.

Uncle Joe replied: "I hope not, Robert; I hope not."

"Wish he 'd call me Bob. I do n't want to be Roberted," growled the smith to the storekeeper, who had come to the door.

But Uncle Joe was too far away to hear. He had not entered the store, but was walking rapidly toward a large, white house: the finest one in the village.

ARTHUR C. PIERSON.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW IN THE OLD LANE.

The blacksmith remained sitting on the sugar-barrel, with his quid rolling from one cheek to the other and keeping time with his eyes, which glanced up and down the road alternately. He had cut off about a foot of the chines of the barrel with his jack-knife, and, for want of other amusement, was drumming the side with his heel.

Both quid and eyes came to a halt as the latter rested upon Jake Conway, coming slowly toward him.

Jake carried in his hand two pieces of iron, which the smith no sooner saw than he exclaimed:

"That everlastin' clevis agin! I 've welded it a dozen times this summer if I hev once."

Jake caught the remark, and replied:

"Now, what 's the use of talking that way, Bob Loomis? You know that you have never mended this clevis but twice before, and if you had half done it the last time, it would not need mending now."

Bob did not resent the saucy reply, but, sliding down from the barrel, which he overturned and kicked into the road, he said:

"Well, fetch it along to the shop. It 's better than doin' nothin'; but let me tell ye, Jake, that it are pesky few clevises that I expect to mend in Risin' Branch any more."

Jake looked astonished; from childhood he had known Bob, and knew that a current saying in Rising Branch was: "If Bob Loomis ever leaves town, it will be to go to the graveyard." Bob held the village, even with its diminutive size, to be a place of much more importance than the surrounding country, and always spoke of himself and the remaining inhabitants as "us town fellers" — an expression that implied contempt for the unfortunates whose lot forbade their residence in the "hub" of the neighborhood wheel.

"Mebbe ye do n't believe it," continued the smith, noticing Jake's look of incredulity, "but it 's a fact; if ye break this clevis again, boy, ye 'll be likely ter mend it yourself."

"Why, what are you going to do, Bob?" said Jake at length.

They had arrived at the shop, and the smith, without answering Jake's question, went to the back part, where he took from a corner a shovel that had evidently just received a new handle.

"See this, Jake," said he, shaking the tool before the face of the puzzled boy; "I hev just put a new handle in this shovel for my own speshul benerfit. I am a goin' onto the road."

"When?"

"Purty soon; right away, this fall."

"Well, what are you going to do with that shovel?"

"Shovel gravel, ye ninny; I 'm goin' ter work on the grade."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jake, "you mean the new road. I thought you meant on the road over at Hanaford."

"Well, I would say!" remarked Bob, with a look of contempt. "Yer must be a gittin' on amazin' fast with them preacher studies o' yourn. What would a feller do with a shovel on the road over at Hanaford?"

"Well, I guess the section hands work with shovels," replied Jake, rather nettled.

"Now, do n't get mad," said Bob, seeing the blood mount to Jake's face; "ye 've got ter carry yerself mild, old boy, if yer a goin' inter this gospel business."

Jake felt uncomfortable in the presence of Bob, but far more so at the allusions. On most occasions the smith would have pushed his advantage, for he lost no opportunity to provoke Jake, that he might find ground for a fling at his "preacher studies." But now the desire to impart the news of what he called a "lift" led him to a conciliatory manner.

He kindled a fire in the forge, while Jake, looking impatient, sat down upon an empty nail-keg.

"Hate ter have fun poked at ye, do n't ye, Jake? But, land sakes, boy, I war only funnin'. Look out! I 'm goin' ter weld her agin," cried he, taking the clevis red-hot from the fire. As he raised his hammer, he added: "This are a sweet job fur a bilin' hot day."

The work was soon done; the fire ceased to glow; and, throwing the clevis down beside the anvil, Bob wiped his face with his apron.

"Jake," said he slowly, "I want ter tell ye something. It are 'tellin's,' but I do n't mind rubbin' it inter yer ear."

Jake looked indifferent. Bob went on:

"Do ye know what kind of a job I hev got, Jake?"

"You said you were going to work at grading, did n't you?"

'Yes, of course," said Bob; "but I do n't mean that. Do ye know what kind of a 'lift' I 'm goin' ter have?"

"How should I know?" answered Jake, at the same time stooping to pick up the clevis.

"Hold on!" cried Bob, kicking it away with his heel; "it hain't got cooled yit. A feller would think ye war a sallymander."

Jake looked foolish. Bob mistook his absence of mind for ignorance, and in a twinkling the boy had fallen a notch nearer to the smith's own level. Jake felt this himself. A shaft that his sense of dignity would have enabled him to repel a moment ago now found easy entrance.

With an air of abstraction, he asked:

"What were you saying about the road, Bob?"

Bob saw his opportunity, and improved it.

"Jake," said he, "come out here into the lane. The clevis won't cool fur a smart spell yit, and I 'll tell ye what I war a goin' ter."

The shop, a log building, faced the road. Behind it was a pasture field, from the farther side of which a lane led toward a small piece of woods. This lane had once been a public road, but had long ceased to be used for that purpose. Fences crossed it at several places, and a rickety pair of bars separated it from the field. Beyond the bars a few rods grew a gigantic oak. The shadow of this oak lay across the lane, and far into the

field beyond. The long summer day was near its close, and the sun was grazing a little cloud that had risen from the horizon.

Bob led the way to a decayed log under the tree. Jake followed, but with the air of one ill at ease. He had never been intimate with Bob, whose rough manners were repulsive. Yet here he was about to be made his confidant. Why was Bob so condescending all at once, and what was the secret he was so anxious to whisper? An impulse moved the boy to stop; curiosity led him on. His foot touched the shadow of the oak, and again he felt the impulse, stronger than before. He entered the shadow; a vague fear fell upon him. Why had he committed himself to this man? What secret could he hold in common with him? He stepped back out of the shadow; his fears fled. He had never known anything very bad of Bob. Besides, he was only going to tell him about his job, and there was probably no great secret in it.

"Hold on!" cried Bob. "You 're not going back?"

"I was just looking at this blackberry brier," said Jake equivocally.

It was not the weakness of the excuse, but its falsity, that made him ten times more the prey of the tempter than before.

He resigned himself without further effort. Both he and Bob entered the shadow, and sat down upon the log.

Before Bob could begin to talk, they were interrupted by voices in the field behind them.

"Here comes Jim Sarcott now," exclaimed Bob, "and old Daddy Sales with him!"

Jake turned his head, and saw Uncle Joe walking toward them, engaged in an earnest conversation with Mr. Sarcott. The latter, in his black broadcloth, with white vest and a large gold watch-chain, in whose fob he had stuck his thumb, walked patronizingly beside the old man. With his free hand, he stroked his heavy beard, or gave it an impatient twist.

Uncle Joe was talking, and Jake caught these words:

"Yes, yes; I hev no doubt about it a growin', but let me tell ye, James, in the shadder of its arthly prosperity the generation that are comin' up will become as stunted as the bushes tryin' ter grow in the shadder of that oak."

Jake followed the direction of the old man's gesture, and his eyes rested upon the scattered clumps that were struggling for life in the baleful shadow.

"Bosh!" replied Mr. Sarcott to Uncle Joe's remark. "It is more than likely the rising generation will grow bigoted in the shadow of a church. It will do well enough for you old folks, as you all believe in it; but what we want here now is 'business,' and we do not want any narrowness to trammel it."

"No need of trammelin' it," replied the old man. "Business men kin be Christians."

Mr. Sarcott did not answer, but he wore a look of doubt. He had caught sight of Jake and Bob, and his countenance at once became expressive of deep satisfaction. Bob looked at him with a broad grin on his face, at the same time glancing slyly toward Jake.

Jake took no notice of this, but the keen eye of Uncle Joe did. The old man seemed a little surprised

to see Jake in Bob's company. However, he said nothing.

The two men passed on toward the back of the field. Beyond the slope ran the branch, and here they paused, while Mr. Sarcott seemed, by his gesturing, to be explaining something about the new road.

"They 're talkin' about that church 'business' agin," said Bob. "The old man wants Jim to give a lot here in the Branch fur a meetin' house. They 're goin' ter pull down the old 'un at Craggy Hill. But, Lor' ! Jim is fuller of railroad than he are of meetin' house."

Jake winced a little. Bob saw his mistake, and immediately added:

"But I should n't wonder if he would do a hansum thing for 'em—if they do n't plague him too much."

"They have not decided to tear down the meeting house at Craggy Hill," said Jake. "May be they will repair it."

"It are past that," said Bob; "but p'raps they 'll build a new one down there." He was about to add: "They will, if Jim Sarcott hez his say," but he checked himself and said: "What I war goin' ter tell ye, Jake, are this: Jim Sarcott hez took the job o' buildin' the new road from Hanaford down here and" — he spoke slowly, and with great emphasis —"he are goin' ter give all us town fellers a big 'lift.'"

He kept on: "It are not in the matter o' wages exactly; them 'll be nothin' small, though." Bob waited to see the effect upon Jake, but the latter said nothing; so he added impressively: "Jake, Jim are a goin' ter help every feller what 'll help him on the road,

to a good, stiddy job in the shops and mills when they come."

"May be they will not come," said Jake.

"Yes, they will, and ye mind it. The company hez promised ter build shops, and Jim are goin' ter put up a mill, may be a factory, too. Now are a good chance for ye, Jake, as well as fur the rest of us. Ye kin take yer old horse, and work on the road this fall, and make enough ter go ter the 'cademy over at Balsamtown this winter; or, wot 's better yit, Jim 'll do a good thing fur sech a feller as you. He are goin' ter git me a stiddy job in the shops; but, my goodness! if I had yer eddication, I 'd feel safe for a book-keeper, or mebbe a foreman in the factories. Jim 'll want jest sech a feller as ye, Jake. He likes ye, too; I heerd him say so."

The leaven was at work.

For the first time Jake was conscious of a dislike to the calling that his mother had suggested as his life's work, and that his own inclinations had approved. Superintendent of a great factory! He yielded to the vision, and in yielding but trod the path that humanity is forever crowding, eager to taste the briefest morsel of authority. Perhaps Bob read his thoughts, for he continued:

"I know ye had a notion ter study fur a preacher, but, land! Jake, it are a starvin' life. Look at old Daddy Gaines. He 's been preachin' since I war a little shaver, and he 's poor ez Job's turkey. He had a farm onst, too, but he would n't do nothin' but preach, and lost it all."

"How do you know that?" asked Jake.

"I 've heerd it often," replied Bob.

Jake did not remark upon the poverty of the evidence; he was thinking.

"Fur that matter," Bob went on, "ye do n't need ter give up yer notion of preachin', fur if ye do n't like 'business,' ye kin go at preachin' agin."

Jake was thoroughly committed.

"Yes," replied he, "and may be I will have made some money, so that I need not depend entirely on preaching."

"Of course," said Bob gleefully, "of course; that 's the idee. Money 'll pile up fast, too, if a feller 's in a good business."

They arose from the log to go back to the shop. The sun had set, and it was gloomy under the old oak. Jake looked around him, and somehow he felt that the deep shade was deeper than he had ever known it before.

CHAPTER III.

A PRIVATE INTERVIEW.

On the same afternoon that saw Uncle Joe Sales riding over the old bridge at Craggy Hill, Bob Loomis was standing in the door of his shop. He had just finished shoeing a horse, and was waiting for the owner to come. He had not long to wait before Mr. Sarcott made his appearance.

Bob led out the horse, a fine roan, which neighed as he recognized his master, and pawed the ground.

"Easy, Billy, easy," said Mr. Sarcott; "you will have a chance to show your mettle soon enough. Bob, I wish you would lead him up to the stable; David is busy, and besides I want to see you awhile this morning."

He waved Bob away with a look that told plainly that he did not wish to stable the horse himself. He had on his fine black suit, and his thumb was twisted carelessly in his watchguard. Bob obeyed Mr. Sarcott willingly, but wondered in his heart what business of importance that gentleman could have with him.

"Wonder if he are going ter try ter git me ter drive Billy at the Hanaford Races Fair-time," thought

he to himself. "More 'n likely, though, he wants me ter fix up his sulky, but I don't see why he couldn't speak about it down ter the shop."

He went on with a sort of vague fear, for Mr. Sarcott was a man of much importance in Bob's eyes. Moreover, it was no common thing to be summoned to his house. His business transactions with Bob, never of a very grave character, were generally attended to at the shop, or wherever he and the smith met.

"Don't know as I'm owin' of him anything," thought Bob, and he glanced ruefully at his shop and the small house beside it, for he had not been a great while out of Mr. Sarcott's clutches. This worthy man had long held a mortgage on Bob's little home, and when Bob fell short in his final payment had graciously forgiven him the balance, and released the place. This unusual kindness had attracted some attention in Rising Branch; some prophesied, however, that Bob would be the loser in the long run. "Mr. Sarcott," it was said, "never gave pennies for puff-balls."

Poor Bob, unacquainted with law, and with a magnified idea of Mr. Sarcott's greatness, reached that magnate's stable with a heart full of imaginings. "Mebbe he are goin' ter make me pay the rest o' that mortgage yit; bend me for a horseshoe though if I see how he kin."

David took the horse, and at the same time Mr. Sarcott, who had reached the house by way of the road, called Bob, from the front gate.

Bob trembled more than ever, for it was evident that Mr. Sarcott wanted him in the house.

Whenever the smith was with his boon companions,

or with the other dwellers in Rising Branch, he loved to display a great familiarity with Mr. Sarcott.

"Jim Sarcott don't want no 'ninny' foolin' with his horses' feet. Me and Jim Sarcott is the only ones that kin manage that horse."

But now Jim Sarcott was rapidly assuming gigantic proportions. The "Jim" had fallen from his name, and "Mr." was written all over him. It glistened on his watch chain, and shone fiercely in his polished boots.

"Come up into my room, Bob." The great man led the way, while the echoes of his voice, as they resounded through the big hall, were concentrated into one tremendous "MR."

Alas! what a fraud most of this greatness is. Bob found it so after awhile.

"He must be goin' ter go back on that 'ere mortgage, er he 'd never a called me up here."

Bob remembered that when Mr. Sarcott wanted him to drive his horses at the Fair he had always sent David to tell him. What meant this summons into his presence?

The room into which Mr. Sarcott ushered the bewildered blacksmith was at the head of the stairs. A new, well woven rag carpet covered the floor, a sofa stood under the side windows, and a large arm-chair was drawn up before a bookcase in the corner. In the case were a number of books carefully arranged in the order of their size, the largest on the lower shelf. These books related to all sorts of subjects, but very prominent among them were two or three about horses, and a large black volume, upon whose back Bob, at

intervals, slowly spelled out the words, "Age of Reason."

In the middle of the room was a table upon which was spread a map. Mr. Sarcott motioned Bob to a seat on the sofa, but went himself directly to the table, where he examined the map for some time before speaking. Bob scanned the room carefully. He had lived in Rising Branch all his life, yet he had never been here before.

"Bob," at length spoke Mr. Sarcott, "I have called you up here, because I have a little business that I can best explain to you from this map."

"It are not the mortgage," thought Bob.

"Come here to the table a moment."

Bob obeyed.

"Here is a map of the railroad survey, Bob," said Mr. Sarcott. "I want you to see it, then I can explain to you what I want."

Bob looked carefully at the parchment upon which the map was made, but it must be confessed that its various lines and colorings rather confused than enlightened him. Mr. Sarcott spent some time in giving him some idea of the localities represented, the relative distances, and the cuts and fills that the road would require.

"Now," said he, putting his finger upon the map, "here, Bob, is Hanaford, and here," he continued, "is the road coming down to Rising Branch."

"Eggsactly, sir," said Bob.

"It is just eleven miles from Hanaford down here to the Branch," added Mr. Sarcott, "and Bob—" he spoke slowly, as if to impress the gaping blacksmith

with the magnitude of the thought—"I am going to build this eleven miles of road myself."

"Yes, sir," said Bob, because he could say nothing else.

"And I want help enough in Rising Branch to do it."

Bob was more puzzled than before.

"Not money, Bob—I have that—but muscle. Do you understand?"

A little light began to dawn through Bob's addled brain. Gaining a little confidence, he answered:

"You want some of us to work fer ye, sir?"

"That 's it, Bob; and I want to give the boys about home here the first chance. Blacksmithing is a little dull just now, is it not?"

"It are always dull enough, sir," replied Bob. "Wuss in this hot weather though."

"Well, Bob, it will be better after awhile, after awhile, Bob. Now I want you especially, for you will make a good hand on the grade."

"Mebbe, sir," said Bob, bowing respectfully and hesitating, "mebbe, sir, while I 'm workin' on the road some feller will come in and sot up a shop, so when the road are done I 'll be clean out of a job."

"Never you fear that, Bob," returned Mr. Sarcott; "there will be more blacksmithing to do when the road comes through here than a half dozen smiths can do."

"The iron horse do n't need any shoeing," said Bob, grinning.

"No, but he needs a good deal of repairing."

"Takes a machinist fer that," rejoined Bob.

"For most of it that 's true, but there will be work

for the blacksmiths, especially in the shops. There will be shops here, Bob, company shops."

"Yes, sir," said Bob, again.

"And now," Mr. Sarcott continued, "if you will let the smithy go for awhile, I 'll see to it that you will have a better thing than ever. In short, I 'll get you a steady job in the railroad shops. And I 'll do the fair thing with every one that helps me."

"No doubt, sir," said Bob.

"I want all the able bodied men I can get, and all the teams; but I want you, Bob, for an overseer," said Mr. Sarcott.

"A what, sir?"

"An overseer. You see, a gang of men working on the road will need what you would call a boss. Now a boss ought to be what I call a 'handler,' a man of 'muscle.'"

Bob was flattered. "As ter handlin' heavy weights," replied he, "I guess I 'm as good as any in the Branch."

"Well," said Mr. Sarcott, "you may have some heavy weights to handle, for I expect a gang of Irish laborers from down about Carterville, besides what I get around here. If I build my woolen mill here I will want some pretty smart fellow to take charge of that after awhile. You could not do that, Bob."

"Why not?"

"Because that will take somebody with an education; I guess you are not much in books."

"No great shakes, thet 's so; but there are one or two fellers in the Branch what is."

"Who are they, Bob? Jacob Conway is one, is he not?"

"Well, yes," replied Bob, "he are one fer certin, but he are goin' to be a preacher and are goin' ter Balsamstown agin this fall ter keep up his studyin'. I don't think he could be turned aside from thet."

"Such a boy as young Conway," continued Mr. Sarcott, half to Bob and half to himself, "might be trained to a good position, and be of use to me and make money besides. If I only had him awhile working for me in this railroad business, I could test his mettle."

"He are honest, if thet 's all," said Bob.

"Oh, yes, his father was so before him; but Simon Conway had no management, and may be the boy is like him. By the way, Bob, don't you think you could mention the matter to the lad, and see if he would try the road awhile with the prospect of a big thing ahead?"

"I kin send him up ter you the first time I see him," answered Bob.

"The trouble about that," said Mr. Sarcott, laughing, "is that the boy is a little shy of me."

"Nothing strange if he is," thought Bob, but he said nothing.

"You see," Mr. Sarcott went on to say, "his mother does not like my creed; I am not one of the 'brethren.' If he should hear a little of old Tom Paine's solid sense from me I suppose it would blast him forever."

Bob puzzled himself to know what Mr. Sarcott meant, still he ventured no question. But the wily man divined Bob's mental inquiries, so he said:

"To be plain about it, Bob, I 'm what folks call an infidel, and the boy's mother has taught him that I am

some kin to old Nick. No, I must get at him in some roundabout way. It 's a pity for a bright boy like that to have his head stuffed full of such trash."

"As ter thet, sir, I do n't know that Jake takes ter me in partiklar. I guess his mother thinks as how I ain't quite enough polished up fer him. He never 'sociates much with me, sir."

"You do odd jobs at blacksmithing for the family, do you not?"

"I shoe their old horse now and then. But Jake and me ain't fermiliar. Now ther 's Andy Pike. He and Jake are thicker 'n two crows."

"Both of the same nest," observed Mr. Sarcott; "their folks would take alarm if I broached the matter. I think you can manage it, Bob. Some time when the boy is in the shop just angle a little, and let me see how he bites. You understand me?"

"In course I do, sir," answered the blacksmith.

"Well, Bob, that is about all. Now I shall depend on you."

"Every time, sir," said Bob.

"And be sure about the boy. I take great interest in boys, especially if they are bright. Jacob would make a good fellow to have with my Will. He would stimulate him some; Will is a little lazy."

"Yes, sir," said Bob, awkwardly.

Mr. Sarcott looked as if he did not relish such ready acquiescence, but he merely showed Bob out in silence.

The elation that an inferior feels at being taken into the confidence of a superior often becomes a lever which unscrupulous men work to great advantage. Bob needed no further inducement. He would work for Mr. Sarcott, and the vision of

future good fortune in the shops was but lightly present to his mind. He returned to the shop, where finding nothing to do, he sauntered down to the store and seated himself upon the barrel where we first met him. He found an opportunity to angle sooner than he expected. How he did it the reader knows.

After Bob had gone, Mr. Sarcott remained walking up and down in the chamber. At the end of the apartment hung the picture of a woman, a matronly looking person with long curls falling carelessly over her shoulders. Her eyes seemed to follow the motions of the walker, who at each round paused to look up into her calm, benignant face.

He had walked in this way a half hour or more, when he stopped before the picture and spoke in a low tone to himself: "Yes, yes; that 's what they say, but who knows? We have to die, that is one thing sure, but nobody knows more than that. I know as much about what is to come as anybody, and that is — nothing." He gazed earnestly into the face of the picture, as if he were waiting for the almost lifelike lips to move and to reveal the great secret. Then he folded his hands behind him and walked again. Hardly a breeze came in at the open window. The quiet of a sultry summer day reigned without, but in the walker's breast went on the bitter conflict. It was that of a soul fighting harder to deny its own intuitions than to gain a knowledge of the truth.

He resumed his reverie. "People die, and since we know that we can not always stay here, somebody has invented the story of a heaven. It is a pretty fable; yes, a pretty fable."

He stopped once more before the picture. "If

there is a heaven, Mary, you are there, or else no one is. But how you can do more good there than here with me and your children is more than I can see. This is a curious God that these church people tell about; He has millions of angels to do His bidding, yet He is always depriving us poor mortals of our wives, our children, and our friends, and adding them to the throng He has about Him already."

"Well," he continued, as he turned away from the picture again, "no one can ever fill your place here, but my children must have a manager. It will never do to let them grow up this way."

He walked toward the bookcase, and as he did so muttered softly: "Yes, the widow is a good woman, even if she is a little bigoted." He took down the big black book, and was carelessly turning its leaves, when a little girl came tripping upstairs into the room. It seemed as if the picture, growing a little smaller, had come down out of its frame and was standing in the floor.

"Well, Nannie?"

"Some one wants to see you down stairs, papa."

"I will be down in a moment, my dear."

The child danced merrily out of the room, while her father, opening the lower drawer of the bookcase, took therefrom a bundle of papers.

"If I can get her good will by putting the boy in a way to help her out of this trouble, it will be a great step," muttered he.

He took a paper from the bundle and unfolded it. *It was a mortgage on the widow Conway's home.*

"Not very big, that's true," said the big man to

himself once more, "but it will puzzle her to pay it. I must go."

He threw the papers back into the drawer and hastened down stairs. His visitor was Uncle Joe Sales.

CHAPTER IV.

A GLIMPSE AT TWO HOMES.

The big brown eyes of Nannie Sarcott followed her father as he walked out into the fields to talk with Uncle Joe. The old man had declined to come into the house, preferring to be in the open air, with the village, whose interest lay so near his heart, in full view before him.

Nannie sat at an open window, resting; for she had just been romping with Pindar, a large Newfoundland dog, the property of her sister Anna, who had brought him home some years before in a summer vacation, and had bestowed upon him his classic name. Pindar stood panting beside the child, and stretching up his neck as if to get a breath of the sultry air, hesitating to cross the window sill.

"Pindar, there is not enough wind to ruffle your hair down here; come, let us go up where it is cooler."

The dog bounded toward the stairway, followed by Nannie, when a shrill voice from the farther end of the hall was heard calling: "Now, Nannie, you are not

going up to your father's room to romp with Pindar. It seems as if you are bewitched. You can't keep still five minutes. Now you had better mind me. You will be into some mischief, I'll be bound, and then I'll be blamed for it. Go into the front yard and play."

"Poh! Poh!" was the reply that echoed through the big hall; "Come on, Pindar."

The housekeeper arrived at the stairs just in time to see Nannie and the dog disappear above. She hesitated a moment, as if she would ascend, but turned away exclaiming:

"I will not stand it! Mr. Sarcott just spoils his children, and yet expects me to train them properly. There's an example of his 'perfect law of liberty!' I wish I had my way with that little one; I would make her mind. He's so 'fraid of force. I don't care: you can not press a tack through a thick carpet with your thumb nail."

The angular features of the woman might have been carved into relief by her sharp voice. She was tall, with an olive complexion and dark eyes. The skin was drawn tightly on her face, and there was less indecision in her looks than her actions indicated, for she turned away from the stairs. She walked with a shuffling step toward the back part of the house. Nannie peeped over the banisters, and saw her retreating form; then, with a smile of triumph, the little malapert ran gaily back to play with Pindar.

"Why, Pindar! what are you doing?" exclaimed the child, as she reëntered the room. The dog ran toward her with a piece of paper in his mouth. This he dropped at her feet, and gave a short yelp, as if in-

viting her to pick it up. "No, no; you naughty dog, you shall not have this paper. It has fallen out of papa's drawer," cried Nannie, seizing the paper and holding it above her head.

Pindar did not catch the paper, but a breath of air did, and in an instant carried it through the open window.

"See there, now, what your have done!"

Pindar simply stuck out his tongue and began to pant.

"Oh, you old scamp," continued Nannie, "I ought to give you a good beating; come right along now and help me find that paper. But just look there at papa's drawer. It is all open. Wait till I shut it."

She went to the bookcase, and gave the drawer a push. "Oh, dear!" cried she, looking into it, "here 's a map, and there 's a house all drawn with a lead pencil." Old Dame Curiosity here took possession of the little soul. Out came the drawer again, and the spoiled child was soon rummaging in its contents. Pindar stood by in expectation.

"You needn 't watch for another one, sir! Oh, my! we must go and get that one that blew out."

Nannie put the drawer again to rights and again tried to close it, but she had pulled it out too far and it would not move. She tried and tried, and was ready to cry with vexation. "Well, it was out when I came in, so it was."

"Dear me!" she continued, "I wonder if that paper was any good. I 'm so tired. I believe it was only a piece of paper, anyhow. Pindar, it was you that did it. Now, just come right on, sir; we must go and find it."

She started toward the door, but stopped to tie her shoe. Then she took a book from a stand and began to turn the leaves.

Pindar yelped.

"Oh, you want to go! do you? Well, I think you ought to feel sorry."

By this time the wind might have blown the paper beyond the reach of search had it been blowing at all; but the day was so still that the vagabond sheet merely floated down to the ground and remained.

"I don't believe I can find it now if I do go down," said the vacillating child.

She remained at play with Pindar a few minutes longer, when she heard a merry voice calling: "Nan, Nan! you good-for-nothing, as the old play says, where are you? Come down here."

"Oh, there's Jennie," exclaimed the child, running toward the stairs. She met her sister coming up, and was immediately hugged and kissed until she gasped for breath.

"Oh, my! let me go, Jennie."

"Why, you minx; I have not seen you for a week. What are you doing up here in papa's room with Pindar? It's a wonder that Mary has not been after you."

"She has been," replied Nannie; "but when did you get back, Jennie?"

Nannie was anxious to avoid any inquiries that might reveal the loss of the paper. She had ample opportunity to turn the conversation, for Jennie had just come home from a week's visit at Hanaford, and was full of news and schemes.

"O Nan, I had a delightful time," answered

Jennie, "I came back just now. Will Timmons brought me over in a buggy. It was a splendid ride, only the weather is so warm."

"Oh, oh, Jennie Sarcott! you had a beau, you had a beau; fie, shame; you ain't three years older than me."

"'Three years older than me,' that's pretty grammar. Well, if I didn't have three years more sense I would be ashamed. It's none of your business, Nan Sarcott, if I did have a beau. I guess there is no nicer fellow in Hanaford than Will Timmons."

"Guess you left all the good temper go out in that hug, didn't you, Jen?"

"Shut up," said Jennie, now considerably nettled. But the bosom that had been filling up for a week longed to pour itself out into some friendly receptacle. Jennie had taken keen delight in anticipating a recital of her visit to Nannie. Her temper soon cooled. Nannie assisted her to dispose of a few bundles, the fruits of a shopping expedition, and the two sisters were presently reëngaged in a friendly conversation.

"O Nan; I was at such a delightful ball, a platform dance, over at Green's picnic grounds, last Tuesday afternoon," said Jennie. "You ought to learn to dance, Nan."

"I am going to," replied Nannie; "papa said he was going to have me learn."

"Just wait," continued Jennie, "until the railroad comes; then if papa builds a new hall there will be club dances, and then you can learn."

"Club dances, what are they?" asked Nannie.

"Why they have what they call clubs in some places, and the members all know how to dance, and every

winter they have dances once a week. There's a splendid club over at Hanaford."

"Is papa going to build a new hall?" asked Nannie.

"I do not know as he is going to build it all himself," answered Jennie, "but when the railroad comes the town here will be bigger, and papa says we ought to have a hall for operas and such things. My goodness, Nan, Rising Branch is such a dry place! You ought to be over at Hanaford; there's something going on there all the time, summer and winter. But it will be lively enough here after awhile."

"I wonder if there will be any euchre parties?" queried Nannie.

"There will be some euchre clubs, I'll warrant," replied Jennie; "there will be some people here, I hope, that we can associate with. Who wants to play euchre with the Spinks and Taberlys?"

"I play with Maud Taberly sometimes," said Nannie.

"O Nan," added Jennie, gleefully, without noticing Nannie's remark, "what do you think? I was over at cousin Dorinda's, you know, and she made me go to church with her last Sunday."

"What, to a real church!"

"Of course, you goose; to what other kind could I go?"

"Well, I meant a big one like I saw when I went with papa to K——, not a log one like the one down at Craggy Hill; that's what I mean."

"Oh, of course, we went to the big Baptist church. Dorinda belongs to it. I got tired, too. There is no fun in it, and one has to sit so still; and,

beside, you keep thinking about the bad things you have done. I do not like to do that."

Nannie thought of the lost paper, but said nothing.

Jennie went on: "The preacher told about Christ and how He is a model for our conduct; but papa says those stories about Christ are all foolishness, just like those about Jack the Giant Killer and the Arabian Nights. I 'm glad of it."

"Glad of what?" asked Nannie.

"Why, glad that the stories the preacher told are not so. One can have a lots better time if they do not believe them."

"Mary says they are so," said Nannie.

"Well, I guess papa knows more than Mary, and so does sister Anna; she does not believe a word of them."

"Eurilda Conway believes them," persisted Nannie, "and she 's awful good."

"Oh, yes; I know Eurilda 's good," said Jennie, "but she never has any fun. Papa says that she is all drying up, and getting old before her time. She is so strict, too. She never comes here much because papa will not go to church. Her mother thinks he 's just terribly bad."

"Well, Eurilda is just the splendidest girl I know of," was Nannie's reply, "I wish papa would let me go to Sunday-school with her."

"Well, he will not," said Jennie, "for he does not want you filled with such crazy notions. I never went to Sunday-school, and I know papa will not let you."

"I was there two or three times," rejoined Nannie, earnestly.

"Well, you were so little then that it could n't hurt you; but you are getting too big now."

The long summer day had died during this childish conversation, and the girls started to go down stairs.

"There 's papa," said Jennie, as she recognized his well-known step in the hall. She ran to greet him, and poured out such a voluble account of her visit that he stopped her with: "Wait, my child, until after I take a lunch. Mary will think I am never coming."

They followed him to the dining-room, where Mary was awaiting them, not, as Nannie read her countenance, in a very good humor.

Mr. Sarcott himself had returned from his interview with Uncle Joe in an unpleasant frame of mind. He had a vague feeling that his opposition to the old man was not for the highest interests of the village. But his own interpretation of those interests did not dispose him to abandon his hostility. He felt ashamed, too, of the unmanly way in which he was seeking to get Jake Conway into his power. "Why did I not see the boy myself?" was his mental inquiry; but he satisfied his conscience by saying, "If I had, I could have done nothing, for the family are all so prejudiced."

Jennie rehearsed to him her visit, not omitting the account of her attendance at church.

"So Dorinda made you go, did she?" said he. "Well, she is a good creature, and I suppose she takes comfort in it."

"A *good* creature!" The sharp voice of Mary interrupted the recital. "I did not know you believe in any goodness, James Sarcott."

"Who said so?"

"Well, you use the term goodness, and you teach

your children that there is no God and no responsibility."

"I have always taught my children that they should do right, Mary."

"'That they should do right?' Why do you say *should?*"

"Oh, plague on your theology! I suppose I have enough sense to teach my children to be moral. Because I do not want their heads filled with religious cant is no sign I want them to go to the bad."

"Well, well," laughed Mary in derision, "you want them to be moral and not go to the bad. Who 's the author of your morality, and who *oughts* them to be good? Of course, this *ought* stands without an author and is perfectly aimless."

"O Mary, be still," said the bothered man; "one look at you ought to disgust the children with this religious nonsense; you have been so nearly a nun for the last ten years that all the springs of youth are dried up and you think a laugh is a consignment to perdition."

"That is an unkind remark. I say it, though you are my cousin. I know I am not as cheerful as I might be. You know the reason better than to speak such an untruth. I can assure you that I would be less cheerful if I drank from the spring of your belief, or rather unbelief."

Mr. Sarcott made no reply.

The girls had listened with commendable deference, and they followed their father into the hall only to bid him good-night.

Mrs. Conway was not pleased with Jake's project of relinquishing his studies to work on the railroad for Mr. Sarcott.

"I am sorry that you have taken this notion, Jacob," said she, "but I may as well tell you, what both you and Eurilda have some idea of, no doubt. What little money your father left at his death is nearly gone; and do you know," added she in a subdued voice, "that Mr. Sarcott has a mortgage on our home?"

"What! a mortgage on our home?" exclaimed both children in a breath.

It would be hard to picture the look of astonishment that Jake and Eurilda wore at this moment.

"I thought father's debts were all paid," said Jake.

"So did I," replied Mrs. Conway; "but in closing up the affairs, for you know I was the administratrix, I have found this mortgage, and it will take most of our money to raise it."

"Why in the world has not Mr. Sarcott mentioned it before?" asked Eurilda.

"I can not tell," said her mother; "he is a strange man. But, perhaps, Jacob, the plan you suggest is for the best."

"Oh, dear!" said Eurilda, "if you had better company I would not feel so bad; but there's Bob Loomis and his companions. Jake, now promise that if you do begin this you will come home every night."

"Why, of course I will," said the surprised boy, who had never been from home over night a dozen times in his life.

The family felt too serious too talk much longer, and the widow, taking down the family Bible, handed it to Jake to read the evening lesson.

The summer night had settled upon Rising Branch. The harvest moon was creeping along the horizon and a light breeze had sprung up which rustled the leaves of

the old oak. From every side came the chorus of the frogs, into which was thrown at intervals the prolonged note of the hylas. A scent of tobacco smoke was on the air. It came from the pipes of a crowd of loungers about the village store. Bob Loomis had left them and was walking slowly homeward. Not far from Mr. Sarcott's house he stopped to pick up a damp piece of paper.

CHAPTER V.

CRAGGY HILL.

Uncle Joe was not disappointed in his interview with Mr. Sarcott. He had expected no encouragement. That gentleman had resolved, the moment he saw who his visitor was, to give him no chance to plead the cause of a church. He talked volubly of the future of Rising Branch, and, with a pseudo-enthusiasm for its business prospects, tried to drown the old man's attempts to broach the subject. Occasionally Uncle Joe pressed it home, but was cut off as we have seen.

"He took a power o' pains," said he in relating the interview to his wife, "to pint out ter me all the forth-comin' improvements at the village, but his perliteness war only a buckler ter ward me off."

Grandma Sales raised her eyes from the big Bible that lay upon her lap. She and Uncle Joe were sitting together on the porch of the old home at Craggy Hill. It was the Lord's day following the patriarch's visit to Rising Branch. She had not been able to attend church in the morning, and Uncle Joe persisted in giving her an account of the sermon. To this he had added a report of the feeling among the brethren concerning the new

church. He passed thus naturally to his interview with Mr. Sarcott, an account of which he had hitherto withheld. The aged matron lifted her spectacles and sat quietly listening. Wrinkles and marks of failing health were plain enough, but there was something else that told of once more than ordinary beauty. The quiet of the fading summer day seemed but an amplification of the tranquillity in her face. A ray of sunshine stealing through the creeping vines at the end of the porch lay like a golden step at her feet. Thorwaldsen or Rogers might have taken her for the genius of Peace.

"I am sure I can't explain it, Joseph," said the old lady; "why a man wants to sot himself up agin such a source of good as a real, God-fearin', laborin' church, I don't know. Surely he ought ter know that he are kickin' again the goads. Look at Paul. He sot himself up again God, and he war humbled in a terrible way."

"Fer that matter," answered Uncle Joe, "there war the Jews and Saul as war teached the same lesson, albeit they never larnt it in full then. As fer James Sarcott, let me tell ye, mother, I don't believe he is so great a rebel as might be thought. He does n't deny to his own heart what he does to me. His faith are too weak, though, to overcome his selfishness. He are weak in his own creed. He wants his children to have the advantages of a church, and yet he fears the influence of it upon his schemes to make money. Satan has showed him the kingdoms of the world, and he has not the power to say, 'Get behind me.'"

"Well, I don't know, I don't know, Joseph," said the old lady; "mebbe you 're right. You were allus better at readin' folks than I am, but I can't see as how

James Sarcott wants his children ter hev the advantages of a church. As far as I hev ever heard, he gives 'em no encouragement ter go, and let's that second gal of his run round to all the dances and such like as is goin' on."

"He sees where he hez been makin' a mistake," replied Uncle Joe; "when his children ware real small he ware always flingin' out about churches and Christians. The two oldest ones, at any rate, hev caught his sperit, but it are beginnin' to bear fruit, and James don't like the flavor."

"It are a pity for Nannie," replied Grandma Sales; "she is a sweet child, an' so much like her mother."

"She are indeed, Samantha," rejoined Uncle Joe, "and James are goin' ter try to throw religious influences around her, without endangerin' his pocketbook."

"I don't understand ye, Joseph."

"Samantha," replied Uncle Joe, solemnly, "would you believe that James Sarcott would like ter marry the widder Conway?"

"Marry the widder Conway?" asked the old lady in astonishment. "Would the widder Conway marry him?"

"I don't know as ter thet," answered Uncle Joe; "I just axed the question."

"What on airth put thet in yer head, Joseph?"

"Well," answered Uncle Joe, "I can't hardly tell what, but I will venture to predict that more astonishin' things than yer imagine will come round fur us ter think on, and purty soon, too."

"P'rhaps so," said the aged wife, "but none, I hope, of the natur you are hintin' at. If anybody in Risin' Branch understands the Scriptures, it are Amelia Conway, and don't they say, 'Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers'?"

Grandma Sales believed firmly that Uncle Joe had good ground for his prediction, but she was never accustomed to press him for explanations, so she said no more, trusting time to make further revelations.

Summer waned into autumn. The leaves grew red upon the maples, and far and near the katydid nightly rasped the nerves of the forest. There were signs of activity in Rising Branch. Work on the new railroad was progressing, and nearly every house in the village had taken some of the hands to board. Jake Conway had foregone his intention of attending Balsamtown Academy, and was working with the old horse on the grade. He had begun this much to the sorrow of both Eurilda and his mother, and the former grieved intensely at his enforced companionship with Bob Loomis. For allowing him to undertake the work at all, Mrs. Conway quieted her conscience with the thought of the family necessities. Jake prided himself to think that he was relieving these, but, at the same time, there was an ambition in his heart whose object was "of the earth, earthy." Uncle Joe, who visited the village weekly, for the purpose of getting his mail, watched the progress of events with no careless eye. A church meeting had been appointed at Craggy Hill, in which it was hoped that some definite arrangement for a new meeting-house could be reached.

On a pleasant autumn evening a few days before this meeting, Uncle Joe and his wife sat conversing again in the old home at Craggy Hill. The old man had just returned from the village, and in the course of the conversation slowly drew the wrapper from his weekly paper.

"What hev you there?" inquired Grandma Sales.

"The Hanaford Register," replied Uncle Joe. "I thought I would look over the week's news a bit."

He unfolded the paper, but before he had begun to read aloud, as was his usual custom, the forcible ejaculation, "Wal, I declare!" startled the old lady into asking: "Well, what, fer pity sakes?"

"I jest expected it; I jest expected this very thing, and mark me, Samantha, it will bear its fruits."

"Expected it, expected what? What on airth is it, Joseph?"

Uncle Joe adjusted his spectacles and read the following advertisement:

FOR SALE—TOWN LOTS.

In Sarcott's Addition to the Town of Rising Branch.
Now is the time to invest. These Lots will double the price paid for them in two years.

THE RAILROAD IS A CERTAINTY. NOW IS THE CHANCE FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO MOVE TO TOWN.

☞For terms address J. SARCOTT, Rising Branch.

"The bubble are risin' into the air, and showin' its colors beautifully," said the old man; "but it will break, Samantha—I kin tell ye it will break."

"I hev no doubt of it, Joseph," was his wife's reply; "but now this bubble are started to floatin' there will be plenty of children to follow it."

"Certainly ther will," added Uncle Joe. "I heard yesterday that Samuel Martin and Jonas Kibbs were both goin' ter move ter the village."

"What! and leave their farms?" asked Grandma Sales.

"Yes," answered Uncle Joe, "and leave more happiness behind them than they will ever find in their foolish chase arter it."

Grandma Sales made no reply, and Uncle Joe sat quiet, but whether he was reading the news or engaged in deep thought no man might tell.

CHAPTER VI.

OPPOSITION TO UNCLE JOE.

The old meeting-house at Craggy Hill had been built when the neighborhood was still a forest. Time and again it had been repaired, until the argument for a new one was the stern logic of events. Where to build was the only question that vexed the brethren there, and to settle this was the object of a week-day meeting. Toward this meeting Uncle Joe had looked with intense anxiety, for he knew that many would not be able to overcome sentiment with sense.

To do this had cost himself a struggle, and he knew that where he had barely achieved victory, a weaker soul might meet defeat.

He knew how many would feel as did he himself, when two nights before the meeting, he was riding homeward from the village and was passing the old church. He was in a serious frame of mind. He was sorry that the widow Conway had allowed Jake to go to work upon the railroad. He was troubled, too, because he thought he saw a trace of some untoward influence exercised upon her. There are times in men's lives when, through the discouragement of circumstances,

they feel a weakening of their greatest moral resolutions ;—a disposition to abandon the object of their highest inspiration as something conceived in a burst of enthusiasm, and impossible to accomplish.

"Mebbe we had better build agin on the old spot," said Uncle Joe as he came in sight of the log church. "I do n't know as I 'm able to carry on this fight single-handed."

An autumn moon had again rounded into fullness, and the shadow of the old building lay across the road like a dark bridge.

"There are sacred mem'ries clusterin' around here," thought the old man, and he reined up his horse opposite the graveyard. His eyes rested upon a stone whose shadow, like that of the church, fell upon the road. A tear stole down his wrinkled cheek and he resigned himself to his thoughts.

"Poor old Father Leeb! Ye kin never think of goin' to worship except here close to yer Barbara's grave. Alas! why should she be sleepin' here at all? Rum and ruin! rum and ruin! It are the same old story. How well I remember them sleigh-bells the night she war married. How happy she looked standin' on the threshold of a new life! No wonder that ye look sad sometimes, old church. I allow that ye are follerin' the feet that have gone out to come back no more forever ; or else watchin' the progress of lives begun at yer altar."

The keen wind of the late autumn moaned softly around the gables of the old church.

"Ye are sighin', yes, sighin' fur yer children wanderin' into forbidden paths," thought Uncle Joe, and he wiped another tear from his cheek. "No, no,"

thought he further, "there are many who will find it hard to leave the old spot. And ain't one of that many your own self, Joseph Sales? Who will ever thank ye for forgoin' the regular visit to those three graves yonder every Lord's day after meetin'?" He was looking beyond the larger stone into the shadow where he knew arose a humble monument carved with three beloved names.

But faith, like Noah's dove, came back. "It kin be done, and it must be done," muttered the old man to himself. "After all, what are we leavin' here but dust? Yes, I say dust, but I know it are goin' to be a task to convince such as Father Leeb that stayin' here is just lettin' dust bind us fast to dust."

So long had the old man tarried that it was quite late when he reached home.

"Goodness me, Joseph! what on airth has been keepin' ye?" was the greeting of Grandma Sales.

"I stopped down by the meetin'-house, and ware thinkin'," replied Uncle Joe.

"A good place to think, Joseph," said the old lady, "but rather a queer time."

"The time and the place ware both impressive, Samantha," rejoined Uncle Joe. "I hev not felt so little like givin' up the site of the old church as I hev to-night for a long time. It are no easy matter to take the old house from its associations, but it are not this so much as thinkin' how single-handed I am in tryin' to have the new one built at the village."

"How do ye know that ye are single-handed, Joseph?" asked Grandma Sales.

"I am sure I don't know who is with me in the matter," answered the patriarch; "at least none as kin help me much."

"Joseph," said his good old wife, impressively, "are ye gettin' so vain in yer old age as to suppose that none but ye kin see the need of buildin' the new church at the village? Ye put me in mind of Elijah when he thought there was none left to serve the Lord but him. Ye are not alone in this matter, Joseph. There are those beside yourself that both know and will help."

Uncle Joe felt this mild rebuke, and he made no reply. Arising quietly from his chair, he took his well-worn Bible from the shelf, and soon he and his venerable wife joined in the evening worship.

The day of the church meeting soon set bounds to Uncle Joe's impatience. Again he set forth, looking much as when he appeared in the beginning of this tale. The colored banners of the woods had begun to fade. Crisp frosts had ripened the fox grapes, and opened the brown chincapins to the gleeful schoolboy. The brown corn-shocks rustled to the cool wind and awaited the attack of the husker. The old horse of our hero trudged slowly on, glancing with longing eye at the heaps of yellow corn, or anon, with head down, dreaming of luxuriant winter fare. A half mile brought Uncle Joe to the log church, where he was gratified to see that a goodly number of the brethren had already gathered. Father Leeb, with his gray locks hanging down to his shoulders and his bent form resting on his cane, was standing near Barbara's grave. Uncle Joe shook his head and muttered: "He are a good Christian soul, but it are him that I most fear." He tied the old horse and entered the church, whither those without soon followed him. The usual preliminaries of a business meeting were hastily attended to. Bro. An-

thony Gimler was made chairman, and the main question was soon under discussion. Whatever forms of opposition Uncle Joe may have expected, and he expected some, he was wholly unprovided for one that now presented itself. Hardly had the chairman begun to announce the character of the meeting, when Elder Tribbey, who had not been at church for three months, owing to sickness, leaned over and said to Uncle Joe in an undertone:

"Well, Bro. Sales, they tell me that you are seeking a little glory for yourself by working to have the new church at the village. It seems to me that a man who understands the Bible as well as you do ought to remember how God punished certain men who sought to exalt themselves and belittle His cause. Have you forgotten Nebuchadnezzar and Herod?"

It was not so much the withering sarcasm of the elder—Uncle Joe had felt that before—but it was the inquiry that it started in the old man's mind that troubled him exceedingly. He ventured no reply whatever, and though apparently listening to Bro. Gimler, he was intent upon his own thoughts. Was he, indeed, seeking his own glory? Why had he not thought of that before? How his inspiration was deceiving him! He had thought he was working in the cause of the Master, and here it was very evident that he was seeking honor from men. He recalled the inward satisfaction that several commendations of his course had awakened within him. He remembered the ragged urchin who had called him Uncle when he was riding to the village in the summer. He thought of the pride that had stolen in upon him when he resolved to be "more than an uncle to this neighborhood." The opposition

of Father Leeb shrank to nothing before this foe arising within himself. His most formidable enemy was to be within and not without. This doubt of his own motives—how should he resolve it? His train of thought was interrupted by Father Leeb, who, with difficulty, arose to his feet and leaned upon his cane.

"Brethren," said he, slowly, "I have been a member of the church for well nigh on to a half a century, and this spot has become sacred to me through many associations. In yon graveyard sleeps my only darter, and ye all know how lately her mother was laid by her side. If I spoke fer myself alone, I would say, Build the new church here, right here where so many of us hev had our eyes opened to righteousness, and where most of us hope to take our last sleep. But I am growin' old, and even if I were not, it would be a grave sin of my jedgment not to see that Risin' Branch village is the one spot of our neighborhood where the blackest cloud of evil is settlin' and where the lamp of God needs most to be set. I kin not speak long. My voice is fer the village. I shall give my poor means to help God's cause there, and the satisfaction I shall have in it ye need not call pride. Satisfaction at doin' what jedgment says is right is one of God's rewards fer doin' right."

This last sentence was a great relief to Uncle Joe. "I hev made no mistake in my jedgment," thought he, "and the devil shall not tempt me from duty by makin' me think my motives is bad."

He was so surprised at the unlooked-for course of Father Leeb that he lost his opportunity to rise and speak. Elder Tribbey was on the floor before him. So confident had Uncle Joe been that the course of Father Leeb would settle the whole matter, that the El-

der's speech astonished him. The latter, who was not only a leading farmer of the neighborhood, but also a lawyer and a Justice of the Peace, spoke in smooth, elegant language, quite in contrast to that of most of his brethren.

"I have," said he, "due reverence for Father Leeb's opinion; but he himself will grant that I have been able, in my position, to see some things more clearly than he, especially since I have been around more of late years. I confess that I attach more value than he does to mere sentiment. I have friends that sleep in this old burying-ground, and there are traditions of interest to me here. If we could move the graveyard, and all our history and traditions, I should favor building in the village. But our traditions and associations here have too much to do in moulding the character of our children to abandon them lightly. For my part I think Bro. Sales, who seems to have started this notion of moving, has had a little too much self-glorification in view. I can not think of making an untoward move, and at the same time encouraging his sin."

Uncle Joe still sat silent. Old Brother Tone drew from him a smile by declaring that, "If we want to soil the church, jest plant it in the soot." "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick," said Father Leeb in reply to this.

Deacon Scammon urged the difficulty of "gettin' out the timber and drawin' it away up ter the village." And Bro. Gimler thought that so few members lived near the village that it would be impossible to raise the means to build there.

Many of the members said nothing, merely waiting to see the direction of the tide.

Uncle Joe's time to speak had now arrived. "I am certainly rejoiced," said he, "to think that Father Leeb has risen so far above selfishness as ter speak as he hez. Surely none of ye hev stronger ties than him ter bind ye ter this old spot. I hev looked fur some opposition, but I hardly expected oncharitable words. Brethren, I hev prayed ter God that I might not seek my own glory in this matter. I am like Father Leeb. If I ware speakin' fur myself, I know I would never consent ter leavin' here. But I see before me a generation comin' up, who, in the course of events, is a goin' ter make their homes in the village. Yes, I see more than this. I see some who do not live there now drawed there by the hope of better worldly sarcumstances. There is a invertation fur them to come now. Mebbe it are a sad comment on human natur' fur ter suppose that they can't walk without the help of Christian influence. But who is there so strong as not ter need the influence of moral instertutions? But more than all, brethren, it are a sad thing ter miss good opportunities. If ye neglect the village now, its Macerdonian cry will strike yer ears and accuse yer hearts in some later time. Somebody else will hear, and will build up the cause, while the success of the gospel there will forever be a standin' reproach to Craggy Hill, whose heart's door was once knocked at and refused ter open." Uncle Joe concluded, and silence settled upon every soul.

It was broken by Bro. Gimler, who arose to put the final question.

Father Leeb leaned his head on his cane, and Uncle Joe sat with half-closed eyes. In clear tones Bro. Gim-

ler called for the vote. *The result was a tie.* Bro. Gimler now had the power to decide, and Uncle Joe gave up the cause as lost. Elder Tribbey smiled complacently, but great was the surprise when the chairman, arising, spoke as follows: "Brethren, when I came here, I thought I knew as well as any one the wants of this congregation. I scouted the idea of building at the village. I feel differently now. I am not yet prepared to give my vote, and doubt not that we all need more time to consider before we make our decision final. Let us seek the counsel of God, and come together at another time."

And so the matter was left; while Uncle Joe, as he thought of the unlooked-for course it had taken, called to mind the words of his wife the night before.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MORNING COMETH.

Winter closed in earlier than usual on Rising Branch; but, throughout its short, dark days, even in the stormiest weather, the work on the new railroad went steadily on. When the cold became severe for a few weeks, the work on the grade was set aside, only that all hands might find employment in getting out ties, several farmers having taken large contracts to furnish the same to the railroad company. Much labor was expended in hauling stone to build culverts, and in this Jake Conway was engaged.

The village store not only doubled its sales, but became nightly the headquarters for a motley assemblage of laborers. There were a dozen or more jolly Irishmen, as many sinister-looking Italians, together with a few men and boys from the neighboring farms. These crowded around the stove in the back of the store-room, sat on the counter, blew clouds of smoke from clay pipes, and rendered the place almost a Bedlam with their songs. Of course, all this was unpleasant to Mr. Dill, the storekeeper; but then, there was money in it. As long as there was such an unusual sale for

pipes and tobacco, he would not complain. Many of the customers of the store, however, sought it in day-time only. Especially was this true of the female portion. A number of rough board shanties had been built along the line of road, and in these some of the laborers lived, with their families. But the greater number, including all the Italians, occupied a large frame boarding-house, which had been temporarily erected by Mr. Sarcott, near the edge of the village. At the head of this establishment, he had succeeded in putting Jeff Stormer and his wife Mollie, who had left their little farm near Craggy Hill, allured by the glowing representations of the great magnate.

"Tut, tut, Brother Stormer! what does all this mean?" had been Uncle Joe's exclamation early in the winter, when, riding by the little home, he saw unmistakable signs of a removal.

"I know it is rather sudden, Brother Sales," replied Jeff; "but the truth of the matter is that Mollie and me has had a little streak of luck. Jim Sarcott has give us the chance to board some of his hands this winter, and on such terms as is goin' to make us a little money. I tell you, Brother Sales, now is our chance. There 's nothin' in farmin', and our little place is not paid off yet. Mollie and me is in good health, and can get more in one year at the village than we can here in three."

Uncle Joe rode on, but he shook his head, and talked in a low tone to himself.

The holiday season had arrived; the jingle of sleigh-bells made the air merry, and Mr. Dill had decked out the village store in a manner unknown before to the oldest inhabitant.

"Well, old fellow, what do you think of it by this time?" was Mr. Sarcott's inquiry, as he entered the store, on the day before Christmas.

"Never saw the beat of it before, sir," replied Mr. Dill, glancing complacently around at his large stock of holiday goods. "The trade never was a fourth as great as it is now."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Sarcott; "there was never anything here to call out trade; but I tell you, Dill, where there 's labor plenty, there 's money plenty. And now, by the way, Dill, my man, we 'll have all this here—yes, sir, right here—another winter. We can have it all, just as well as Carterville or Hanaford can."

As Mr. Sarcott made this remark, he made a sweeping movement with his hand, indicating the handbills that filled the store, advertising holiday pleasures in the two towns.

There was a flaming announcement of a "Grand Holiday Ball," to be given under the auspices of the K. L. D. of Hanaford; an "Exciting Bicycle Race" at Simpson's Hall, in Carterville; "A Magnificent Carnival and New Year's Masquerade," for the benefit of the "Sons of Liberty," etc.

"None of these organizations here, Sarcott," said Mr. Dill.

"Never mind, Dill; we 'll have them here, or branches of them, never fear. And another thing; you know the boys are all off to-day?" Mr. Dill nodded. "All off, of course, and will be for a week. Most of them have gone over to Hanaford, or down to Carterville. No need of it, Dill—none whatever. This money could all be kept at home."

Mr. Dill said nothing, but looked mystified.

"You understand?" said Mr. Sarcott, knowingly. He made a motion with his hand toward his lips.

"Oh, ah, yes, I see," said Mr. Dill; "exactly so."

"There 's an excellent place, right there," said Mr. Sarcott, pointing to a door that opened into a side room.

Mr. Dill nodded again, this time with a look of great satisfaction upon his face.

"Do n't let another month go by, Dill, but lay in a stock. The boys come here through the week, I know; but Saturday nights, Dill, Saturday nights — pay-day nights, you understand—*you lose them.* These Irish will have it; and, as far as I can see, they work just as well, if not better. We might as well profit by it as any one."

Mr. Dill rubbed his hands and nodded again. At the same time, he handed Mr. Sarcott a box of cigars. The latter took one, and, lighting it, continued the conversation:

"Well, Dill, the new mill is a fixed fact. I let the contract yesterday. Work will begin upon it as soon as spring opens. Lots are going off fast, too. A number of people from the country are sure to build in the spring. They are considerably stirred up down about Craggy Hill. I am afraid" — and here Mr. Sarcott indulged in a hearty laugh — "that there wont be a corporal's guard left down there to listen to old Daddy Gaines preach. My gracious! how the prospect of a few shiners stirs up the saints!"

Mr. Dill nodded and laughed.

"By the way," continued Mr. Sarcott, "I sold that corner lot to Jack Dover, of Hanaford, the other day. I guess I know what he wants with it, too. Do n't let

him get ahead of you, Dill. There 'll be business enough for two of you, no doubt; but the one that gets the first hold has the best show, you see."

Mr. Dill replied with his usual nod, while Mr. Sarcott threw the stub of his cigar into the stove, and turned to go out.

"Come here, Dill, come here," he called, just as he reached the door. Mr. Dill responded at once. "Look at that! There is business for you. What did I tell you?"

Two teams hauling immense saw-logs were passing by.

"What! is that Colby Haines?" asked Mr. Dill.

"That is just who it is," answered Mr. Sarcott. "Colby has rented his farm, and is going to build here. He is getting out timber for his new house already, and I sold him a lot only last week."

Mr. Dill looked very much surprised, yet perfectly gratified.

"He is going to build a nice one, too, I can tell you," added Mr. Sarcott.

"Craggy Hill Church will miss him," said Mr. Dill, slowly; "he is a strong member."

"Oh, well," replied Mr. Sarcott, carelessly, "the saints can stand it to take a little extra trouble in getting to church, if they are making money, you know. The fact is, Dill, I have been down to Craggy Hill lately. I have been holding a little revival down there. In other words, I have been showing the folks how necessary it is to make good provision for the body, and where to make it, too. Old Joe Sales wants to follow them up, and keep the church under their noses. We 'll trip him up on that, though."

Mr. Dill nodded. Mr. Sarcott said no more, but walked toward his home.

The storekeeper returned inside, and immediately entered the little room indicated by Mr. Sarcott. It began at about the middle of the storeroom, and ran parallel with it to the end of the building. It had been used as a weighing and ware-room, and was partially filled with barrels and boxes.

"Do n't know why I did n't think of it myself," was the soliloquy of Mr. Dill. "It can be done like a top. Good place for the stove right here. Counter right across the end. 'T will keep the boys out of the main room a good deal, too." He rubbed his hands and nodded vigorously, as if assenting to some proposition that he had made to himself.

The holidays came and went. Though Mr. Dill did a good business, nevertheless the pleasure-seekers of Rising Branch found their chief attractions in the two large towns.

Thus matters stood in the village, when, about two weeks after these events, at the close of a pleasant winter day, Eurilda Conway, who had been out making some calls, returned to the cottage. She found her mother preparing tea. Jake had not come from his work. It was a little past his usual time, and Mrs. Conway inquired of Eurilda if she had seen him.

"No, mamma," replied the girl; "I have not been farther than the store. I saw some of the hands around the boarding-house, though, and I thought they had just come from work. They quit now at half-past four."

Eurilda did not notice the troubled expression that crossed her mother's face; for her eye had caught sight

of Jake through the window. "There he is now," she exclaimed, straining her eyes to see through the dusk. She hastened to assist her mother with the tea.

After some delay, Jake came in.

"Are you not later than usual, my son?" asked the widow.

"Later!" answered Jake, "how much later? I am sure it is not much later than it was last evening. Do you expect a fellow to get home every time just as the clock strikes, mother?"

There was something so unusual in Jake's manner that Eurilda exclaimed:

"Why, Jake, what's the matter?"

"Matter?" replied Jake, "why, what's the matter with you and mother? I am all right. Here it is just a little later than my usual time, and you both pounce upon me as though I had been into some mischief. I can't always get home at the same minute."

Tears mounted to Eurilda's eyes. Jake had never been so abrupt before. Mrs. Conway said nothing, but the troubled look on her face grew deeper. Jake saw it, and, as if ashamed of his ill-humor, sought to excuse it. "O never mind, 'Rilda. I declare I did not mean to be so short. I felt a little tired, too, mother, that's all. Those Italian fellows are enough to vex the life out of me. They pile upon the sled every night and want me to haul them up to the boarding house. It is too much for the old horse after a hard day's work."

Eurilda's cheerfulness immediately asserted itself. Naturally sympathetic, and always trusting her brother implicitly, she did not notice the equivocation that the more experienced mother did. A consciousness of his mother's distrust made Jake hang his head. For once

the manly look with which he had been accustomed to face her was missing.

But no word of reproof passed the widow's lips. She was silent, and her silence oppressed Jake like a sultry day.

The family sat down to tea. Eurilda attributed her mother's silence to weariness. Mrs. Conway herself was troubled. She had compromised with sin in letting Jake go upon the railroad. The excuse she had made, and with which she had satisfied her conscience, seemed somehow to-night to be very trifling. The family were poor, it was true, but how little had she manifested her Christian faith! Trembling at the shadow of adversity, she had exposed Jake to temptation and probably turned away his eyes from the waiting harvest fields of the Master. For a moment the resolution entered her heart to forbid him to return to his work. But then came the thought, what could he do? It was midwinter, and teaming for the road was the only industry that offered any remuneration. Fear triumphed over faith, and the widow remained silent.

"Oh, what a Quaker meeting!" exclaimed Eurilda, when the silence was no longer endurable. "This does not seem like tea-time at all. You must not let the Italians vex you, Jake, for when you do not feel well it makes mother so blue."

Mrs. Conway now spoke: "I ought not to feel so, children, I know; but you, Jake, can see how important you are to the well being of our household. You are the head of the family, and it 's no wonder I should feel a little bad when anything is wrong in a direction so vital." There was something forced in the widow's remark, as if she spoke more to restore cheerfulness

than from a conviction that her sadness was without cause. Jake perceived this, but Eurilda did not.

"O Jake!" exclaimed she, anxious, perhaps, to turn the thoughts of the famlly into more pleasant channels, "I was in Mr. Dill's store this afternoon, and do you know that he is fixing up that little side room? He is painting it and putting in a counter at the back part. He is arranging new shelves back of the counter, and has made a doorway to the cellar. What is he going to keep in there?"

An expression as if a vague fear had been suddenly realized crossed Mrs. Conway's face.

Jake looked up surprised, and for a moment he blushed. "Oh," said he—and if Eurilda did not, Mrs. Conway certainly did detect an effort at evasion in the remark—"I guess Mr. Dill has to have more room, his business is increasing so. Rising Branch is growing, you know. The morning cometh, mother."

"Yes, Jacob," said the widow, in a tone so solemn that Eurilda was startled, "and, I fear, also the night."

CHAPTER VIII.

AND ALSO THE NIGHT.

February had come, and the weather continued very cold. Jake had not joined the hands who had gone to work in the woods. His enforced idleness was a source of discomfort to the family, not only because it cut off a much needed income, but because both Mrs. Conway and Eurilda saw that it affected Jake in an untoward manner. He was frequently absent from home, nor did he give any satisfactory account of himself.

He was waiting for the weather to moderate sufficiently to allow of work's being resumed, when one morning Bob Loomis called at the cottage. His object was to summon Jake to help pile the ties that had been hauled along the railroad.

"The old man told me to take a gang of fellers and tackle them ties," was his greeting to Jake. "I thought as how measurin' would be light work, so I cum fer ye," said he, with a patronizing smile.

How much his association with Bob had undermined Jake's sense of superiority was observable in his reply.

"That 's the ticket, Bob! I knew you would n't forget me. I will not have to lift any, will I?"

"Not a pound," answered Bob; "I will set them Italians ter pilin' and you and me will measure. Come on; we won't need the old horse to-day."

Mrs. Conway now came to the door. To her Bob made an awkward bow and said: "Mornin', ma'am; I cum fer Jake. Seein' as how he war laid off I thought I might give him a lift measurin' ties."

"Very well, Bob," was the widow's only reply. She then followed Jake into the house. Bob thought that he heard her say: "I wish it were not so, Jacob." Then followed some words that Bob could not understand.

Jake appeared to be in no haste, so Bob thought, for a full quarter of an hour passed before he reappeared, carrying his dinner pail.

"Yer must think I 'm an Eskimo," said Bob, a little tartly.

"Why did n't you come in?" replied Jake. "I wanted you to do so."

They started to their work, and presently Bob said: "The old lady has been objectin' a little, hey, chick?"

Jake's face flushed. Bob had never before spoken lightly of Jake's family. The boy's native spirit asserted itself.

"Bob Loomis, you will either speak respectfully of my mother or you will part company with me."

Six months ago Bob's reply would have been conciliatory, but now he replied: "Oh, hold on, sonny; yer ain't ready ter lose the chance of makin' that dollar yer owe Mike Follin."

Instantly Jake's face changed. A look of surprise and guilt settled upon it. This was followed by a look

of real despair, the quiescent look of an animal exhausted in trying to escape from a trap.

"Who told you anything about that, Bob?" he asked, almost imploringly.

"Why, yer green punkin," answered Bob with a jeer, "did yer think that Mike war a goin' ter keep it? But what 's the odds," he continued, "if yer did swing a trump or two? It 's no more nor some of yer best church members do."

"Who?" asked Jake, eagerly.

"Well, take old Sile Tribbey, fur instance; he plays keerds to hum, and calls it soshal amoosement, or something o' that sort, but skin me fur a painter if I kin see why its any soshaller than playin' over there in the cabin fur chips."

Jake's face wore a look of relief. Mark it, you liberal, card-playing church members: That boy justified his first step in gambling by Elder Tribbey's delinquency.

"Bob," said Jake, after they had nearly reached the scene of their labor, "I am not going to play with Mike any more."

"Who are yer goin' ter play with?" asked Bob.

"Nobody at all," answered Jake; "that was the first time I ever played, and it will be the last."

"Sho!" said Bob, "what 's bad about a game o' keerds? If Mike are fool enough ter back yer out, why take him up,—that 's my say on 't.

"I think that I was the fool," rejoined Jake; "he beat me and won my money."

"So he did the last time," laughed Bob, "but ye are sharp enough ter peel Mike if ye only practice a little. He are no hand at keerds."

"Not another game, Bob," was Jake's emphatic re-

ply; but Bob merely grinned. They had now arrived at the railroad, where a gang of Italian laborers had already gathered. "Whar's Mike?" shouted Bob in a domineering tone.

One of the Italians ventured a reply in very broken English. "Mike no get up. He no come yet. Too much so," and here the man made a motion as if drinking from a bottle.

"Yer lyin' Italian spalpeen!" shouted a voice at this moment, and the men looking up, behold! the delinquent Mike was seen just back of the Italian ready to strike him with his fist.

Bob sprang quickly to ward off the heavy blow, but he was too late. It descended with tremendous force. The laborer fell like a log, striking his head upon a tie and cutting a deep gash across his face.

"See if yer 'll lie to the boss any more," shouted the half drunken wretch, with a savage oath.

The words were scarcely out of Mike's mouth when the iron grip of the blacksmith closed around his neck and forced him on his knees to the ground. It was well that it was so; for the remaining Italians, infuriated at the sight of their bleeding comrade, were about to rush upon him in a body. They stopped at the command of Bob, but their threatening looks and deep mutterings boded no good to the intoxicated Irishman.

"This are a pretty how d' ye do," said Bob, relaxing his hold on the half strangled Mike. "Has Dill been puttin' his whiskey bar'ls on tap already? Yer tarnal fool, whar did yer get yer grog?"

Mike blubbered forth an incoherent answer, but Bob gleaned from it that Dill had opened a barrel of liquor the day before and had filled several bottles for the hands.

"Seems to me Dill are a little in a hurry," growled Bob; "he had better wait till he gits his license. I'm afraid the old man has made a mistake fixin' it so that these varmints kin git likker at the village."

Mike had now arisen and was making his way toward a small board shanty hard by, whither the wounded Italian had also been conveyed.

"Come back here," shouted Bob, "if yer don't want yer fool head broke." Mike obeyed, and as he did so his eyes fell upon Jake.

"Hic, hello, Jake! why yer, hic, jes the feller I want ter see. Come over, hic, ter shanty and we'll, yes we'll" . . . . The man could not finish the sentence, but sank reeling to the snow—dead drunk.

The shame, the humiliation, the deep anguish that overspread Jake's face at this moment, it is hard to describe. Was this the company into which his temporary turning away from a high purpose had thrown him? Was it possible that he was indebted to this beast? And such a debt! A realization of his bondage broke upon his soul. An impulse to rush away, confess all to his mother, and renounce his employment forever was followed by a feeling of utter helplessness. He was in the power of the Evil One; he knew it, and it paralyzed him.

He was roused from his reverie by Bob. "Here, Jake, help me carry this fool inter the shanty."

Jake obeyed reluctantly, and the two, aided by one of the Italian workmen, deposited Mike in the shanty. The rough board structure had been built as a place where the hands might warm in cold weather. A cracked coal-stove occupied the center and was heated red-hot. On a rough board sat the wounded laborer,

who had now pretty well recovered and who scowled darkly upon his late assailant.

The air of the shanty was stifling, and Jake was glad to get into the open air.

"Well, chicken," said Bob to Jake, "that war well nigh a riot, war n't it?" Jake was so ashamed and so bewildered that his answer was wholly irrelevant.

Bob noticed this and asked: "Are ye skeered, Jake?"

"No," answered Jake, "but I wish I had not come out here this morning."

"Poh! yer goose, you would make a pretty boss, now, would n't ye? I tell yer if yer ever expect ter manage men yer must n't turn girl when yer see a knock-down."

Jake felt the stab, for he had spoken hopefully, in Bob's presence, of becoming superintendent when Mr. Sarcott started his mills. The Italian who had been hurt was now able to join his comrades, and the men all began their work. But Jake Conway's heart was heavy. He reproached himself for ever having been persuaded by Bob to work for Mr. Sarcott, yet he never thought of blaming his mother, who, at this very moment, was conscience-smitten for having given her consent to the project.

At noon, Bob, instead of remaining and eating his dinner, left the men and went across to the village. When he returned he was accompanied by Mr. Sarcott. This gentleman, after inspecting the cords of ties piled for some distance along the railroads, entered the shanty.

Poor Mike was still sleeping off the liquor he had taken, and snoring in blissful unconsciousness of the discharge that Mr. Sarcott ordered.

When the "old man," as Bob now styled him, was about to go back to the village, he stopped beside a pile of ties that Jake was measuring.

"When you go home, my lad," said he, kindly, "I wish you would stop a few minutes at my house."

Jake bowed respectfully, but the summons only added to his mental distress.

The day wore on till working hours were over. All hands were preparing to go home when Jake ventured to ask Bob: "What do you suppose he wants with me?"

"Nothin' that yer need ter be afraid of," answered Bob. "He likes yer, Jake, and now put on all the slickness yer kin."

Whether this advice was to be applied to Jake's clothes or to his conduct, Bob did not explain.

The boy rang the bell at the residence of Mr. Sarcott and was ushered up stairs by Nannie. "Papa, here's Eurilda's brother," was that little lady's announcement.

"Ah, yes; ah, yes," said Mr. Sarcott, advancing to meet Jake, "he ought to be proud to be such a young lady's brother."

"I am, sir," said Jake with a boldness that startled even himself.

"Exactly," said Mr. Sarcott again; "I admire your manliness, my lad. Always be true to your sister."

It must have been the reaction that affected Jake, for immediately after his remark he began to feel very uncomfortable. Perhaps this feeling was heightened by Mr. Sarcott's own conduct, for he seemed laboring to give a reason for wanting Jake to call.

"Well, my boy," said he, "I am told by Bob that you are a young man who will bear advancement in my service. I wanted to see you to-night. I want to ask more about your qualifications. Have you ever studied book-keeping?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jake, "I studied it two terms at the Balsamtown Academy, but I never put it into practice."

"Well, maybe you will soon have a chance to do so. You had better brush up on it these long evenings," returned Mr. Sarcott.

Jake's gratified look furnished Mr. Sarcott with a pretext, so that gentleman continued: "I believe, my boy, that I will take you into my mill. I am going to build one immediately, and I will need an honest, capable man whom I can train to be manager."

This lofty possibility, magnified by his own imagination, removed whatever constraint Jake may have felt in Mr. Sarcott's presence.

This was exactly what the latter wanted. He soon found opportunity to draw from Jake the condition of the Conway family affairs. Jake told him freely of their financial condition, and expressed the hope that his own efforts in Mr. Sarcott's employ would help them pay off the mortgage.

To this Mr. Sarcott made no reply. Instead of that, he said, "Now, young man, I hope you will continue to conduct yourself as you have, and be sure to keep clear of the vices of the railroad hands. I must say that your work at present is among a hard set. You saw that this morning yourself."

"Yes sir," replied Jake. At the same time a realization of Mike Follin's claim came over him. What if

Mr. Sarcott should find it out? Jake trembled at the possibility. A vague fear coupled with vexation at himself combined to make him irritable. In this humor he arrived at home.

When Jake had gone, Mr. Sarcott began to pace the room. "The widow takes a great deal of interest in that boy," said he, soliloquizing. "I'll keep him near me. She'll follow pretty close." He made two or three rounds of the room, then stopped near his desk, and stood absorbed in thought. "She don't get down among the 'brethren' much while I keep the boy busy. Now if I can only keep the 'brethren' away from here! I wonder if a few dollars would n't make Sile Tribbey faithful to the 'old traditions'?". Here Mr. Sarcott chuckled as if a new idea had suddenly seized him.

"Fool!" The word echoed through the chamber with startling clearness. It seemed to come from the hall.

Mr. Sarcott turned toward the door. The dark, lustrous eyes of Mary met his own.

"Well!" said Mr. Sarcott, fiercely.

"Well!" replied Mary, mockingly.

"What do you want?" asked the former.

"It's a nice thing to believe you are an infidel, is n't it, James?" was the answer.

"To believe I am an infidel," returned Mr. Sarcott; "what do you mean? I am one. I never deny it."

"Yes you do," retorted Mary; "you lie to your judgment so as to ease your conscience. Oh, it 's so consoling to believe we 're responsible for nothing! It leaves us so free to carry out our pet schemes, you know."

Mr. Sarcott was so astonished at the woman's boldness that he stood hesitating. Mary gave him no chance to reply. "What excellent advice you do give to that young man," she added, with withering sarcasm. "You caution him against the vices of the railroad hands. Who has exposed him to them? But then, there 's no hereafter. Oh, no!" Mary vanished as suddenly as she had appeared, while a prolonged echo, "Oh, no, no—no," came back from the hall.

Mr. Sarcott arose and shut the door violently.

He was very angry. "If she was n't—well, never mind, I say she should leave this house." He soon calmed himself and spoke in a lower tone: "I never said there is no hereafter. I do not have to be a Christian to believe in God. But then the girl is a fool. What need I care?"

He now seated himself at his desk, with his favorite book; but he seemed ill at ease.

In the mean time quite a different scene was passing at the village store. Mr. Dill had gotten his license and had opened his saloon. "Come, boys," said he, early in the evening, "we 'll have a drink at my expense to celebrate the occasion."

A crowd of laborers had assembled, among whom was the unfortunate Mike. He had recovered from the effects of his debauch sufficiently to realize that he had been discharged. Mr. Dill's plan succeeded nicely, and the free liquor soon rendered the motley crowd both very thirsty and very liberal. Drink flowed freely. Mike, to drown his trouble, poured down the fiery liquid, and with each glass his ill humor seemed to arise. He cursed Mr. Sarcott, and finally turned his attention to the Italians, a few of whom were present.

His eye ranged among them to find the man whom he had struck in the morning. He was not there.

"Ye leather-faced furriners!" shouted Mike, "where 's the spalpeen I poonded forninst the shanty? It are the fault of him thet the ould man hez give me the boonce." At these words the intoxicated man advanced with his hand upraised in a threatening manner. The Italians retreated, but Mike followed them up. Mr. Dill came from behind the counter to remonstrate.

"Let me alone!" cried Mike; "let me give the blackguards the compliments av me fist."

He was close upon a tall Italian, who had turned fiercely around in the door and was fumbling in his red sash.

"Look out, Mike!"

The warning came too late; there was a flash in the lamplight, a muttered curse, and the body of Mike fell heavily to the floor. At the same moment every Italian fled.

The first to lift the prostrate form was Bob. He had been present smoking, but it was noticed that he had steadily refused to drink.

"Bring some water, ye tarnal girl-baby," cried he to Mr. Dill, who, in great trepidation stood wringing his hands. "He are cut in the neck," said Bob, "and I guess he are done fur. I guess yer did n't look fur this in yer openin' 'programme.'"

A doctor was hastily summoned. He appeared, accompanied by Mr. Sarcott. The night had come.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO PIECES OF STRATEGY.

The news of the disgraceful occurrences at Rising Branch village spread rapidly through the neighborhood. Mike was not killed, but was so badly hurt that his getting well was a matter of doubt. Poor Dill was so badly frightened that he did not appear at the store the next morning. Mr. Sarcott, who visited him in his little bedroom, did not soothe his feelings.

"To think of its happening, Dill, the very night you opened," was that gentleman's greeting. "Where were your wits? When you saw Mike was quarrelsome, why did n't you order him out?"

"Oh, do n't speak of it," said Mr. Dill, sitting up and untying his handkerchief from his head. "It has broken me all up; do you think that we will be indicted for riot, James?"

Mr. Sarcott's reply was given with a look of contempt for such abject cowardice.

"Indicted for riot!" said he with intense disgust, "you ought to be indicted for being a fool. Do n't you see that the name of the village stands in more danger

than your miserable little body on account of this fight?"

"Well, yes," replied the storekeeper, cringing a little, "I thought of that, but then, James, you know—"

"Yes, I do know," said Mr. Sarcott, cutting him off angrily. "I know that you care more for your own precious self than for the business interests of this village. This will be a pretty pry for the saints at Craggy Hill to get under my projects. Your wretched management threatens all the possibilities of growth here."

"Why James," whimpered the little man, "you advised me, you—"

"I know I advised you," said Mr. Sarcott, still more angrily, "but I supposed you had some sense. I wanted to help you make a good thing, and so it would be if properly managed, but you have got to have some nerve. You must let these fellows know that you run things and not they."

"When the whisky's in the wit's out, you know, James," said Mr. Dill, timidly. "We ought to have a police."

It was no source of satisfaction to Mr. Sarcott to think that a project which he himself had started should so soon show its dangerous side. He was angry; first because the danger had shown itself before the project had resulted in sufficient pecuniary gain, and second because he failed entirely to excuse his conscience. Not only this, but a keen insight into the effects of the brawl on the church question served to disturb his mind.

His only answer to Mr. Dill was: "Now get out

of this coop as quick as you can, and open the store. Don't act as if the plague had struck us."

He left Mr. Dill struggling with his fears, having first exacted a promise from him to open the store as though nothing had happened.

Mr. Sarcott walked toward his home absorbed in thought. He looked like a man striving to rid himself of a painful recollection, and indeed he was; for in spite of himself Uncle Joe's words were ringing in his mind. The old oak tree, with its leafless branches lifted into the winter air, did not banish them.

"Yes, yes; I hev no doubt about its growin', but let me tell ye, James, that in the shadder of its arthly prosperity the generation thet are comin' up will become as stunted as the bushes tryin' ter grow in the shadder of that oak."

The bushes were covered with snow now, and the dull, cloudy day gave no shadow to the tree; but still the words rang louder and louder in Mr. Sarcott's mind. He reached his house and entered the great hall.

"Pshaw! what foolish superstitions will haunt a fellow. This is the effect of some of the Sunday-school nonsense that they used to stuff into my head," said he to himself, as he hung up his great-coat. But still the words were ringing in his soul.

He went to his room, and thither he summoned David, the hostler, bidding him to hitch the horse to the sleigh. While he was waiting for David, Mary came in. Her dark eyes rested full upon Mr. Sarcott before he became aware of her presence. Her face wore the same pinched look as when we first met her, and her movements were slow and undecisive. But

there was a look about her that told plainly enough of more physical than mental infirmity.

Mr. Sarcott was bending over his desk when her sharp voice startled him.

"Well, James, your young rosebush has bloomed early. That's a nice flower it bore last night."

"What do you mean now?" said Mr. Sarcott, much irritated.

"What do I mean? O James, just as if you did n't know! Of course you had nothing to do with getting Mr. Dill to start a saloon."

"Who said I had?" asked Mr. Sarcott, his face blazing with anger. "What business have you to insinuate anything of the kind? I tell you what, Mary" —here his voice arose to a louder key—"I want a stop put to this impertinence of yours. It is simply none of your business what I do or what I do not do, and I want you to understand it."

"Whose business is it?" inquired Mary, so calmly that Mr. Sarcott was perfectly nonplussed.

"Well, ah well, none of yours," he said, as if puzzled for a reply.

"None of mine! You expect your boy home soon, to add him to the charges I already have. Oh, what an assistance a rum hole will be! So handy, too. I am so thankful for your consideration. By the way, James, what a nice thing it is to disbelieve in God. One can do just as they please—"

"Now that's enough harping upon that old string," broke in Mr. Sarcott. "As for the care of my children, you will be relieved of it sooner than you wish."

"Not in the way you expect, James Sarcott; mark my words, not in the way you expect. You think I

do not know your plans, but I do. I will be relieved of the care of your children sooner indeed than you think, but not in the manner you desire."

She turned abruptly and left the room.

"What does the girl mean, anyhow?" said Mr. Sarcott to himself. "I wonder if she has an idea of my plan. She's afraid of losing a home, I suppose. But no; it can not be that. She knows that I dare not turn her out. Well, she is of little use to me in caring for the children, that's certain. Jennie dislikes her and Nannie has no fear of her. I must push matters, and that lively, too. This row will give me a good excuse for calling on the widow."

A smile played over Mr. Sarcott's face, and it remained there when Nannie came to announce David with the horse.

"Papa, where you going?" inquired the bright-eyed girl; "can't I go with you?"

"Not to-day," said her father stooping to kiss her. "I may not be back before night, and it is too cold for you to be out so long."

"That's just the way," rejoined the child, a little pettishly. "I never get to go anywhere. There's Jennie now, she's going this very night with Will Timmon's in a sleigh, so she is."

"What do you say, Nannie?" asked Mr. Sarcott, pausing on the stairs. "Jennie has asked no permission of me. You go and tell her to come here."

In answer to Nannie's summons Jennie appeared, wearing a look, it must be confessed, of defiance.

"Jennie," began her father, "what is this that Nan-

nie tells me? Have you asked my permission in this matter?"

"I did n't think you would care," answered Jennie, now casting her eyes to the floor. "Mr. Timmons and you are good friends, and Will is known to be as steady a young man as there is in Hanaford."

"Well, where are you going?" asked Mr. Sarcott.

"To a ball in Hanaford."

"What! Away over to Hanaford on a cold winter night? No, no, child, you are very foolish. I would rather you would ask me about things of this kind. I do not wish you to go. Hurry and write Will a note; it will go on this afternoon's mail. Now mind me, my daughter."

At this very moment there came into Mr. Sarcott's mind some of that same Sunday-school nonsense. A text floated into his memory up out of the years when a Christian mother had given him instruction—"Honor thy father"—it was on his lips, but no—*how could he quote it to his child?*

He staid no longer with his daughters, but, putting on his great-coat, entered the sleigh and drove off.

"O you mean little wretch!" cried Jennie to Nannie, as soon as their father had gone. "What made you tell papa?"

"You did not say I should n't. Papa often lets you go to balls. I did not know that you would care."

This Nannie said with a very long face, indicating that the term "wretch" had stirred the inmost fountains of her soul.

"Well," said Jennie, "you might have known that he would object to my going so far. But you have n't

a bit of sense. I am going, though, you 'll see if I do n't."

Nannie was weeping and too much stirred by her emotions to hear Jennie's last sentence. The older sister left Nannie to tell her troubles to Mary, and, still wearing her angry expression, went to her own room.

In the meantime Mr. Sarcott drove on his way toward Craggy Hill. As his sleigh glided along he fell into his old habit of talking to himself.

"Jennie needs more care; that 's certain. I am afraid my building a hall here will do her no good. She is too fond of dancing now. I have half a notion to send her off to school. I think I will ——" He was going to say "until I get a better housekeeper," but he paused and did not speak it aloud. He renewed his soliloquy presently, and said: "I think a new mother, such a one as ——." Here he ceased again as if in fear of being overheard. The sleigh-bells would have prevented this, nevertheless he only thought the rest.

A mile beyond Craggy Hill lived Elder Tribbey, and Mr. Sarcott drove directly to his house.

"Ah, Sarcott, how are you? how are you?" said the Elder, who had watched Mr. Sarcott's approach and stood waiting for him at the gate.

"Good-day, Squire," said Mr. Sarcott. "How 's the rheumatism?"

"Oh, nothing to speak of; the news from the village has driven it all out, I suppose; but come in." The two were soon seated by a roaring fire in the great room of the old farmhouse. The Elder brought a big pitcher of cider and set it upon the table.

"Well, Squire, you are not as scrupulous as your friend or rather your brother Sales. He would think

that performance the unpardonable sin," laughed Mr. Sarcott.

If there was any name that was distasteful to Elder Tribbey, it was that of Uncle Joe. This Mr. Sarcott well knew.

"Humph!" replied the Elder in disgust. "Do you think that the old man Sales would miss a good drink of cider if he was sure nobody was looking?"

"I don't know as to that," replied Mr. Sarcott merrily, "but you are hard on the old fellow's morals, are n't you?"

"Not a bit harder than he deserves," returned the Elder. "He is altogether too anxious to be regarded as a saint. And I, for one, am always suspicious of these exceedingly good fellows. By the way," said the Elder, trying to turn the conversation, "what have you fellows been trying to do at the village?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Mr. Sarcott, who now had the Elder exactly where he wanted him. "It was rather a serious thing for the Irishman; it need not have happened, if Dill had been more careful. He should have ordered Mike out when he saw he was drunk."

"Is n't it likely to hurt business a little at the village?" asked the Elder.

"Not a bit, Squire; not a bit," said Mr. Sarcott with emphasis. "It was a quarrel that might have taken place anywhere. There is a matter, though, that is likely to hurt us a great deal more, and, by the way, this is what I came down to see you about."

The Elder was all interest. "What 's that, Sarcott?" he asked, eagerly.

Mr. Sarcott poured out a glass of cider, and taking a sip, held the glass in his hand while he spoke.

"I don't know how true it is," he began, slowly, "but they tell me that you fellows are going to build your new meeting-house up in the village."

"Well! what of that?" asked the Elder, in some surprise. "You seem to stand in need of it up there," he added, laughing.

"I am not so sure of that," replied Mr. Sarcott. "A church is a good thing, no doubt; that is, it is a good thing in its place. But it is like anything else, a bad thing when not in its place."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the Elder, somewhat puzzled.

"I mean," said Mr. Sarcott, "just this: You can just as well build your house at Craggy Hill. It will do as much good there as anywhere. If you put it in the village you will endanger some strong business interests. To be plainer, McCracken and Wale, of Hanaford, told me the other day that they would not buy those lots that belong to you and the other fellows down here, and would build no factory, if a church were built in the village."

"Why not?" questioned the Elder again.

"I do not presume to say why not," answered Mr. Sarcott, "everybody has his own tastes, you know. Like Shylock, people do not always assign reasons for their tastes. I simply state the facts. If you build a church up there, those lots, that some of you down here have invested in, will not be worth much, I can tell you."

The Elder was touched in a tender spot.

"What do you suppose those lots would bring, Sarcott?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"You could double your money on them now, if

those Hanaford fellows do n't go back on you," was the reply. The Elder coughed slightly. Mr. Sarcott resumed. "You see those lots across the creek are in competition with yours. Hanaford capital is bound to come to the Branch, but if you fellows build your church up there, the factories will go over on the other side of the creek. The water-power over there is about the same."

The Elder remained silent for some time, apparently lost in thought. Mr. Sarcott's plans were working very well. Presently, however, the silence was broken with a thrust that brought from the Elder all that the wily villager sought.

"I suppose, though," said he, "that your church affair will be settled pretty much as old man Sales says."

"Why?" asked the Elder, with a sudden start, "why so?"

Mr. Sarcott affected surprise. "Oh, I thought he was the chief man among you—the Mogul, so to speak."

The Elder did not attempt to conceal his disgust. "Chief among us!" said he with a sneer, "I do n't see how you got that idea. But you need not worry about the church's going to the village. I have opposed that for a long time. As far as the lots are concerned, I would not let their depreciation affect me in the least, but to tell the truth, Sarcott, I have always been opposed to the church's going to Rising Branch village."

"Ah!" said Mr. Sarcott.

"Indeed I have," repeated the Elder, "and though I assure you that I don 't care a fig for the business side of the matter, yet if you will feel any better, I

can guarantee that no move will be made with my consent."

"Well, it will be the best thing for the church itself," said Mr. Sarcott, "and at the same time will be the best for the village. A jangle between the town and you fellows would be a bad thing for you."

Mr. Sarcott was putting on his coat while he said this. He now walked out to his sleigh, accompanied by the Elder, who reminded him that Uncle Joe was certainly not the "Mogul" of Craggy Hill. Indeed the good man even intimated that if such was the title of the leading spirit in the congregation, he might, not inappropriately, bear it himself.

Mr. Sarcott bade him good-bye and drove away. The sleigh-bells jingled merrily on the frosty air, and in their jingling was the echo of a laugh.

"It will be a little late for me to call at the widow's," said Mr. Sarcott, when he was fairly out of sight of the Elder. "I think I'll make a short call, though," he concluded; so toward the Conway cottage he directed his horse.

The sun went down, and a cold north wind, bringing a few flurries of snow, betokened a stormy night. The hours wore on, the clock struck nine, and David still sat watching impatiently for the return of his master.

The wind was fitful and irregular, now driving a dark mass of clouds over the moon, now filling the air thick with snow, and now clearing the heavens to a perfect blue.

The shadows of the Sarcott house fell across the road and reached to Mr. Dill's store, from which a bright light streamed forth to be swallowed up by them.

A gust of wind and a flurry of snow came from the north. As if it had been blown hither, a single sleigh appeared in the shadows close to the gate of the front yard. There was a low whistle, answered by a light that burned for an instant in the upper room. The muffled figure in the sleigh sat motionless. A moment elapsed, and from the side of the house beyond the store emerged another figure.

"O Will!" said Jennie in a whisper, "I was so fearful you would not get my note and would come straight in. Papa is gone, but I expect him every minute, so let us hurry."

"Where's Mary and Nannie?" asked Will.

"Nannie is asleep and Mary's in the kitchen reading. She thinks I have gone to bed."

The young man had driven toward the store, in front of which he now stopped his horse.

"Oh, where are you going, Will?" asked Jennie, in alarm.

"Just to see Dill's new store a moment. Here, hold the horse; I will not be gone long."

"But, Will," remonstrated Jennie, "papa may come along at any moment."

"Suppose he does; cover up your head and he will not know you. This is a strange horse and he can not tell the rig."

The young fellow ran into the store without waiting to hear Jennie any more. He was gone but a moment, but it seemed an age to the guilty girl.

"O Will, what do you scare me so for?" she asked. "What did you want in there, anyhow?"

"I only wanted to see the new bar-room," answered Will.

There was a smell of cloves in his breath, and Jennie suspected what she dare not accuse him of.

"We must get back by two o'clock, Will, and you must help get into the house," was her only remark.

The sleigh sped away toward Hanaford. Nannie was sleeping quietly in her little room. Mary still sat reading. David stormed and swore at his dilatory master; but that master still sat talking to the Conway family in the little cottage. He was in a very good humor, and Eurilda wondered that he used to seem so distant. Again the wind blew a dark mass of clouds across the moon; it was at the very moment that Mr. Sarcott came out of the cottage.

"Ah," said he, "it is getting dark." He glanced at the moon struggling in the shadows. In a moment its light was gone. A huge cloud had completely darkened its face. A change came over the man's feelings. Yes, I say a change; for he did not fail to read that symbolism in the skies.

"Pooh!" he exclaimed, as he gave his horse to the impatient hostler, "I wish these foolish superstitions would not affect me so."

CHAPTER X.

AN UNUSUAL VISITOR.

Mr. Sarcott was not a stranger to the Conway cottage; he had been neighborly enough in the lifetime of Mr. Conway, but since his death the distance between the families had gradually widened. Moreover, Mr. Sarcott's wife had maintained a social connection with the Conways, which had lasted till her death. Mrs. Sarcott, like Mrs. Conway, had been religious, and the tie of Christian fellowship thus broken could not be renewed by the infidel husband. Possibly poverty may have played its part, for the Sarcotts were rich and the Conways poor. At any rate the visits of the Sarcott children to the home of the Conways gradually ceased. Anna Sarcott had gone away to school. She was nearer Eurilda's age than were Jennie and Nannie; and the sons of Mr. Sarcott, even had they remained at home, could have little in common with Jake, whom they remembered merely as a little boy.

It was no wonder, then, that Mr. Sarcott, as he drove homeward from Elder Tribbey's, found himself puzzled for an excuse to call at the Conway home.

Do not think, dear reader, that the tender sentiment of love had taken possession of Mr. Sarcott. He was far too selfish and scheming for that. He had known the widow in her more prosperous days; and scoff as he might at the faith that had sustained her in her troubles, yet he recognized the value of a character like hers in a household like his own. The tendencies of his children were painfully apparent, and now his love for gold,—aye, that was it, his love for gold—was about to lead him to put new temptations into their path. There was money in the saloon; more money in a new dancing hall—but his children—there was the rub. Yet he chuckled to think that he was equal to the occasion. He would make money with one hand and protect his children with the other. The widow's influence in his house should stand against the influences without. O foolish man! O selfish man! The words rang for a moment in his soul, but only for a moment; the tempter whispered "go on!" and the voice was hushed; and the cold wind blew from the east; and the night thickened; and the sound of the sleigh-bells was all that the great man heard.

It was fully dark when he arrived at the little cottage. Tying his horse, he approached the door—not without embarrassment, for he was still pondering an excuse for his unusual call. Jake came to the door, and was not a little surprised to see his employer. But Jake's surprise was slight compared with that of Eurilda and her mother. Mr. Sarcott saw at once the expression of their faces, and at once relieved the situation by exclaiming: "Don't be astonished to see an old neighbor, even if he is a little delinquent in his calls."

"Indeed it is an unusual thing to see you in our house, Mr. Sarcott," replied Mrs. Conway, recovering a little and setting a chair for him. "It seems that since Simon and your Mary are gone you have almost forgotten us."

"Oh, no, Amelia," answered Mr. Sarcott, addressing her as had been his custom in time past, "not so bad as that; I know I have not dropped in often—"

"You have not been here these three years," said Mrs. Conway, interrupting him.

"Indeed," returned Mr. Sarcott, "is it so long as that? Well, I have been busy; but then, Amelia, I have known every day how you and your children have been, and as for the mere matter of visiting, you know that my older children are not at home and Jennie and Nannie seldom go anywhere. Perhaps I should not have called now, but I thought that you, like everybody else, would be disturbed over the trouble in the store last night. Common calamities bring old friends together, you know."

"Oh, it was terrible!" replied the widow. "I am so thankful that Jacob was not there. Indeed, James, I am worried a great deal when I think of the temptations this world throws into the path of our children."

Unconsciously, indeed, had the widow, by this remark, given to Mr. Sarcott the opportunity he sought.

"Here is a go," said the wily man, inwardly. "If I can do nothing else I can play the Christian duty game on her. Maybe I can persuade her that she can fight Apollyon for two sets of pilgrims." Aloud he remarked: "Yes, Amelia; but if everybody were like you, our children would get along all right."

"Why, what do you mean, James?"

"Oh, your influence over children is good," rejoined Mr. Sarcott. "I often think that, seeing it is woman's duty to direct the training of children, it is a fine thing that they take to religion easier than men. I don't believe much in the communion of saints myself, but then I have no doubt that your Christianity helps to keep things even here on earth and probably turns your heads away from mischief."

"I am sorry, James," replied the widow, "that you have none of that faith which was so strong in your wife, especially when you have the care of two comparatively young children on your hands."

A less thoughtful man than Mr. Sarcott might have seized the opportunity at this point to bring matters to a crisis, but Mr. Sarcott was too cautious for this. He had satisfied himself that the widow's love for her own children, coupled with her sense of Christian duty, was the line along which he could best conduct his plans. "If I can keep Craggy Hill influences from reaching her," thought he, "I will make this matter successful." To the widow's remark he did not reply, but sat for a while looking thoughtfully into the bright coal fire.

Presently he spoke: "I suppose the brethren at Craggy Hill have about settled on the place of building, have they not?"

"Not yet," replied Mrs. Conway; "but I hope that they soon may, and that our village will no longer bear the reproach of being without a place of worship."

Mr. Sarcott smiled, but the widow neither noticed nor interpreted the smile. She continued: "I will be glad enough to attend chnrch when the house is

nearer, for Jake finds it a hard task for the old horse to go on the Lord's day beside working all the week."

"The old horse has not done much this cold weather," said Mr. Sarcott.

"No," said the widow, "and for that reason I have been able to attend church nearly every week; and it does me so much good," added she, after a pause.

Mr. Sarcott remained silent. "I suspected as much," thought he. "I must keep her away from Craggy Hill. The saints down there are no friends of mine."

"Well, Amelia," said the schemer aloud, "my principal business here to-night is to talk to you about your son."

A look of anxious inquiry crossed the widow's face, which Mr. Sarcott noticed.

"Oh, the boy has been in no trouble," said he quickly. "I am glad to say that he minds his own business and does not loaf about the village at night; I have another matter entirely that I wish to speak about." The anxious look did not leave Mrs. Conway's face, however, and Mr. Sarcott continued.

Both Jake and Eurilda had retired to the kitchen very soon after Mr. Sarcott's entrance, for neither of them could associate a visit from him with anything other than some business pertaining to the mortgage. To the widow alone Mr. Sarcott made known his plan.

"Amelia," said he, "you know that I have arranged to build a mill here at the village, and beside this I have another project in mind. Parties from Hanaford are of the opinion that a woolen factory here will be a paying investment, and we are about to organize a stock company for this purpose. Now, we are

going to open the subscription books in Hanaford next week, and I want to put Jake in charge of this business over there."

The widow's eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Why James, Jake is not ——"

"Jake is perfectly capable of doing the work I want done," said Mr. Sarcott, cutting short her remark; "besides, it will fit him for a work of greater responsibility in my mill. I tell you, Amelia, your boy has ability, and now, as a friend to his father, I am willing to bring him to the front. Of course this will take him away from home some, but with your daughter here you can contrive to get along until he returns."

Again the struggle between faith and necessity began in the widow's heart. Would not the temptations in a town like Hanaford be greater than any to which he had yet been exposed? She and Eurilda could get along, but to think of Jake absent among strangers!

But on the other hand there were the family circumstances. Without Jake's help, what could be done? The mortgage hung like a cloud over the little home, and of the small amount that Mr. Conway had left at his death there was but a trifle left. Bad as all this was, another thing troubled the widow far more. Was not Jake already drifting away from his intention of preaching the gospel? How would his first choice be affected by this new plan?

Mr. Sarcott observed the widow's silence, and guessing the cause, observed: "Jake can command more wages, of course, than he gets now; indeed I can afford to pay him well."

On the table lay a dress, the widow's best, which

she had been mending when Mr. Sarcott knocked. She glanced at it, and again a sense of her poverty came over her. She knew, too, that Eurilda's wardrobe was but scanty. How could she do otherwise than let Jake go? She looked around the room with an embarrassed look, as though she sought some one from whom she might ask advice.

"O James," said she at length, "I need more time to think of it. If I could only consult some of my friends."

"Who?" asked Mr. Sarcott, eying her sharply.

"Uncle Joe Sales has always been a friend to our family," answered the widow, innocently, "and he has been my best counselor since Simon died."

Mr. Sarcott bit his lip, but he repressed his anger, and replied calmly:

"Oh, as to that, Amelia, I do not know why a woman of your judgment can not manage her own affairs. Uncle Joe is a good old man in his way, no doubt, but then he would naturally be prejudiced against me. Your religionists are very narrow, say what you will. I was a friend to your husband, as you well know. I certainly am anxious to do his family a kindness. You may make a grave mistake in your judgment and fail in your duty toward your boy, if you prevent his seizing so good an opportunity."

Poor Mrs. Conway was confused. Reader, do not blame her if she yielded.

"Well," said she, with an air of abstraction, "perhaps it will be best, if Jake wants to go."

"Well, you can mention it to him in the morning," said Mr. Sarcott; "and now there is another matter. If Jake should go over to Hanaford, it will be too much

of a task for you and your daughter to take care of the old horse. One of Bob Loomis's horses is sick, and if the weather opens I will be a little short of teams on the railroad. You had better let me take the horse for Bob. It will save his feed and add to your income."

"But, James," said the widow earnestly, "I want the old horse. Eurilda and I would far rather manage him than lose the opportunity of attending church."

"You can go with Colby Haines," replied Mr. Sarcott. "He will be glad to take you."

"But," replied the widow, "Colby is so irregular since he moved to the village."

"Oh, well, his family all go to church every Sunday," rejoined Mr. Sarcott. And the widow yielded again. And Mr. Sarcott chuckled inwardly.

He left the house and entered the sleigh, which Jake had brought around from the friendly shelter of a shed.

The night was growing colder, and the bells tinkled merrily between the irregular gusts of wind that drove great patches of clouds across the moon. Mr. Sarcott was in high spirits.

Jake and Eurilda listened in great surprise to their mother's revelation after their visitor had gone.

"Good!" said Jake. "It will be just the thing, mother. I tell you I don't believe that Mr. Sarcott is half as bad a man as some people make him out."

"But, Jake," said Eurilda, and her face was even more troubled than her mother's, "I am afraid that if you do this you will give up your intention of preaching."

"Oh, dear," answered Jake petulantly, "suppose

I do, 'Rilda, can't I be good even if I don't preach? I should think, too, that in our circumstances the first thing to be looked at is to get our home into shape again."

"O Jake," said the girl, running up and throwing her hands around his neck, "it was father's wish, and one of his last, too, that you should preach the gospel. As to our home, have you forgotten the promises of God? O mother, do not give your final consent. I know we are poor, but God has never forsaken us yet, and He never will."

The dark hair of the girl, becoming unfastened, fell in long tresses on her shoulders, her eyes gleamed as if an inspiration were firing her heart, and she clung to Jake as though she feared that the evil impending over the household might take shape and carry him away. Mrs. Conway was not only astonished, but alarmed.

Jake loosened Eurilda's arms, and exclaimed: "Why, Eurilda Conway, what do you mean?"

"Just what I say, Jake," replied the girl, a little more calmly. "I know that if you do this you will not preach. You may think you will come back and follow out your old resolution, but I know you never will."

"How do you know it?" asked Jake, half frightened and half vexed.

"I can not use language to tell why," said Eurilda, "but I know you never will; and, O mother, you know, too, how father always wished it."

Mrs. Conway was deeply rebuked by this unlooked for outburst of faith on the part of Eurilda. She was ashamed at the weakness that so often betrayed her into compromising Jake's future, and now she

dared not own that she had absolutely given her consent to Mr. Sarcott's plan.

Before she became collected enough to speak, however, Eurilda recovered her own composure. The storm that had swept across her heart left no trace of cloud behind it. Slowly she gathered up her hair, fastened it and sat down before her mother.

"Mother," said she, fixing her dark eyes upon the sorely confused widow, "I have a plan that will perhaps help us out of our troubles ——"

"Why, what in the world, 'Rilda," said Jake interrupting her, "has got into you? We are not so bad off yet. You talk as though you and ma were going to the poor-house and I to perdition," The clock struck ten just as Jake made this remark.

"Eurilda," said the mother, quietly, "we are all too confused and disturbed to talk longer upon this subject without seeking counsel from God. Let us have our evening prayer, and after we sleep we may be better fitted to act."

To Jake this was not agreeable.

"O mother," said he quickly, "you and 'Rilda always take everything so gravely. If you have promised Mr. Sarcott that I could go, you had better stick to your word; and as for my preaching, I don't see that I must necessarily give that up."

Yet Jake in his heart knew better than this. His past conduct in relation with Mike Follin was arising before him and becoming a barrier in his path to the pulpit. He knew that his late associations had rendered even a religious life distasteful, yet he did not know his danger. He sincerely thought that he could follow Mr. Sarcott's plan awhile and return again to

the path first marked out for him by his father. But the subject was dropped for the night, and the Conway family united in their usual devotions.

David, Mr. Sarcott's hostler, had finished putting away his master's horse, but he continued to grumble while he went his rounds to see that all was safe about the barn before retiring. It was midnight before he sought his lodge over the great stable. He was partially disrobed when he started at the sound of a horse's hoofs. Looking toward the road he saw a sleigh driven into the deep shadow of the house. A closely wrapped form descended from it. There was a hurried consultation with another form remaining in it, and then the first disappeared in the shadow. The sleigh drove away, and David opened his eyes with astonishment.

"Wall, Jinnie, yer purty well bundled up, but I'd know yer walk if I saw yer in Europe."

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE JOE AGAIN.

It was with eyes wide open with astonishment that Uncle Joe Sales listened to a recital of the tragedy at Rising Branch. On the same morning that Mr. Sarcott had started out to lay his plans so deftly, Andy Pike, who had been at the village, rode homeward past Craggy Hill and furnished the exciting news. Uncle Joe lost no time in imparting it to Aunt Samantha.

"The Lord be with us!" was her pious ejaculation, "hez it come to this so soon, Joseph?"

"It hez," was the old man's reply, "and I thank God fur it."

"What?" exclaimed Aunt Samantha with a cry of surprise, "what do ye say, Joseph?" She half arose from her chair and caught Uncle Joe's arm.

"Don't be alarmed, Samantha," said he, releasing her convulsive clutch, "I am in my right senses, and I say again I thank God fur this kerlamity."

"Joseph," said Aunt Samantha, "I don't understand ye. Why are ye thankin' God fur the murder of this poor humin?"

"It ain't for the murder of a humin bein', Samantha; no, not fur that. I pity the poor feller that hez been sacrificed ter the greediness of these money vultures, but Samantha, I can't help believen' thet he hez died fur the savin' of the *rest*, albeit he hezn't done it willin'ly."

"But he hez not died yet, so Andy tells ye."

"No," continued Uncle Joe, "but if he does die, it will mebbe open the eyes of James Sarcott to the truth of what I hev told him, and pave the way fer the brethrin at the church to come to a righteous decision. O Samantha, I feel as though I couldn't hev it any other way! What will Risin' Branch be without God's cause is planted there? Satan hez got a good start of us even as it is, and we will have hard work to catch him. But Samantha, I feel that this thing is a diversion of God in our favor. The evil effects hev showed themselves sooner than I thought, and facts is more than argyments. But Samantha, listen, I've somethin' else ter tell ye. Somethin' that will be for the openin' of some of the brethrin's eyes, and specially Silas Tribbey's."

Aunt Samantha lifted her spectacles and pushed them back upon her head, while Uncle Joe drew a chair before her and sat down; then he solemnly raised his forefinger in token of the great importance of what he was about to reveal.

"You know last week when I went over to Hanaford ter git them harniss mended?"

"Yes," nodded the good old woman.

"Well," said Uncle Joe, "that day I was in at McCracken and Wale's. Now McCracken, so they tell me, hez a little leanin' toward the church. His

wife are a member. He and Wale was a talkin,' and without wantin' ter be an eavesdropper, I could 'nt help hearin' a bit of their conversation."

"'McCracken,' said Wale, 'they say they are goin' to tear down the old Craggy Hill meetin' house and build agin up at Risin' Branch.'

"'I hope they will,' said McCracken, 'specially if we take a notion to build a factory over there.'

"'Yes,' put in Wale, 'the best hands we hev here are them fellers that belong ter Jones' church down there by the bridge. But I heard that Jim Sarcott was fightin' 'em over to the Branch, and tryin' ter keep a meetin' house out of the village.'

"'Oh, well,' said McCracken, lettin' the very cat out o' the sack thet I showed ye long ago, Samantha, 'Oh, well,' said he, 'Jim Sarcott wants the widder Conway, and he 's afraid if the church comes up there the members will set her agin him, fer he 's a infidel of the worst kind.'

"'Well,' said Wale, 'he 's a fool, if he *is* a infidel. He 'd better not oppose their church ; he 'll lose more in the long run than he 'll gain. I heard that they were goin' ter have a saloon over there. He 'd better oppose that.'

"'Yes, sir-ee,' I heard McCracken say, 'I saw that young Timmons that trots over there to see one of Jim's girls drunk as a fool the other day.' I was obliged to make known my business at this point fer fear they'd think I was listenin," said the old man, "and so I did n't hear no more."

Not two hours after Uncle Joe had related his conversation to Aunt Samantha, Mr. Sareott sat in Elder Tribbey 's house and told him the matter concern-

ing McCracken and Wale, which our readers now see was a sheer fabrication.

"But Joseph," asked Aunt Samantha, "how will this open Bro. Tribbey's eyes?"

"Ye see, Samantha," answered Uncle Joe; "the thing of it are just here: Silas Tribbey has been bitin' at some of James Sarcott's bait, and hez bought some of them village lots. He is expectin' to make some money on them by sellin' of them to some o' them fellers in Hanaford to build a mill and a factory on. Mebbe if spiritual considerations won't move him, the hope of arthly gain will. In either case we will get what we want."

"Well, Joseph," remarked his wife, solemnly, "the Lord does appear to be workin' fur His own cause. I hope thet ye will be able to use these instruments so as ter be successful."

"Never fear that, Samantha," replied the old man, and he chuckled a little as if feeling perfectly confident of success. Indeed he did feel exactly that way. He now had no doubt that he possessed a lever that would move Elder Tribbey, while he had not the slightest idea that any of the other brethren would, in view of the occurrence at the village, hesitate any longer to vote for a removal.

Even in the midst of his exultation, however, his old-time enemy came back to vex him. Was he not doing it all for his self-glorification? Why was he exultant? Was it because the cause of the Lord bade fair to succeed, or was it because he had gained an advantage over his opponents? It was some time before he could overcome these feelings, but Aunt Samantha, who had not been slow to notice the change in his

mood, only attributed it to his well known habits of meditation.

The old couple had sat quiet for nearly an hour, Aunt Samantha reading her Bible, and Uncle Joe, though "wrestling," as we have seen, yet apparently lost in thought. Presently the aged wife broke the silence:

"Joseph," said she, "ye was tellin' me that the hull matter was restin' on the say of Anthony Gimler. If he was a wantin' more light, as he said, I can't help feelin' that the Lord hez furnished it ter him by lettin' this thing happen."

"Perhaps he hez," answered Uncle Joe, "but I fear that Bro. Anthony war more afraid of offendin' Silas than he war in need of more light. It are Silas that I want ter work with, Samantha, and I think I kin do it."

Aunt Samantha lapsed into silence again, and presently Uncle Joe left her and went to attend to some of the simple duties of his farm.

The short February day rapidly spent itself, hurried on to its close by fitful gusts of wind and squalls of snow. Now and then the dull clouds parted, showing great patches of blue sky across which the driving snow-flakes chased each other in confusion. As evening approached the sky grew clearer and the air crisper. Still occasional clouds brought flurries of snow from the North. The stars came out and the moon arose. Now she glided like a white ship over a broad expanse of ocean, and now plunged into the irregular banks of clouds as fated ships plunge into the mists that skirt rocky islands and dangerous coasts.

Uncle Joe had finished his evening's work and had sought his fireside with the county paper in his hand.

Aunt Samantha was busily knitting. Mr. Sarcott's sleigh had just arrived at the widow Conway's and that gentlemen was preparing to enter the cottage. It was night again in Rising Branch—but what a night!

The fire burned low in the chimney-place of Uncle Joe's big kitchen. Aunt Samantha's knitting lay in her lap while the old house cat pawed the ball of yarn that had fallen upon the floor. Uncle Joe nodded and his paper hung dangerously near the coals of the hearth.

Suddenly Aunt Samantha started and threw up her hands. The knitting fell to the floor, startling Uncle Joe, who sprang to catch the reeling form of his wife. The heavy arm-chair was overturned and the frightened cat rushed frantically to the door. Uncle Joe eased the form of his wife as it sank to the floor, then hastily entering a side room, he returned with a pillow and a small bottle.

"She hez taken another spell," said he, kneeling by her side and rubbing her head with the contents of the bottle. In two or three minutes the deathly pallor on the aged wife's cheek had given way to a more natural hue. Uncle Joe gently lifted her up and seated her in the big chair.

"Call John's folks," she whispered with difficulty. "I am better now, but you are alone and Lisette is a good hand when I have these spells."

The effort exhausted Aunt Samantha and for a few minutes she sat struggling for breath. She soon became much easier; then Uncle Joe, setting a lamp in the kitchen window, hastily drew on his big boots and ran rapidly across the field that separated his house from John Tone's. It was the work of a few moments to summon these two good neighbors and they arrived

in time to render material assistance to Aunt Samantha, who had been attacked again.

"I must fetch Dr. Mosier," said Uncle Joe, making preparations to go to the barn. Aunt Samantha shook her head.

"Who then, Samantha?" The old lady motioned to Mrs. Tone, who bent down close to her ear.

"Peters!" said the sufferer.

"Oh, laws a' goodness, Aunt Samantha, he 's one of them homypaths!"

"Does she want Peters?" asked Uncle Joe.

"Yes," said Mrs. Tone, "but——"

"Let her have her way," said the old man, "Peters lives up on the Hanaford road and it is a mile closer than the village."

"But Joseph," remonstrated Mrs. Tone, "since when hev ye taken to these homypaths?" But Uncle Joe was out of sight and hearing in so short a time that the good neighbor was obliged to smother her prejudice and attend to her sick charge.

Uncle Joe's sleigh was soon speeding up toward the Hanaford road. The old horse, unused to the repeated taps of the whip, resented them by taking the bit into his mouth, and breaking into a lively gallop. Uncle Joe's hair streamed backward in the wind. The sleigh jolted over the rough knots, giving the appearance of a runaway to the ancient-looking horse and his master.

The wind blew Uncle Joe's hat over his eyes, and a flurry of snow almost blinded him just at the moment that he turned into the big road leading to Hanaford. Hastily reaching for his hat the reins fell from his benumbed hand, and the old horse sprang forward at an increased gallop.

"Ho!" crash! and Uncle Joe's heavy sleigh came to a standstill so suddenly as to pitch the occupant heavily forward upon the dashboard. At the same moment he was conscious of a lighter sleigh turned upside down but with its horse's head just abreast of him. He hastily leaped from his own sleigh and caught the strange horse by the bridle. Righting the vehicle, which was wholly uninjured, he assisted its occupants' a young man and woman, to their feet.

Hardly had the latter caught sight of the aged form before him than he broke forth with a torrent of abuse, mingled with curses.

"You old fool, what you tryin' to do, you gray heaheaded (hic) lu-unatic (hic) is n't a big r-r-road wide enough?"

"Sh! Will' sh! O Will!" and the young woman tried to whisper in his ear, and at the same time she drew her shawl closely around her head and shoulders.

"What, what! tut, tut! my child; I think ye need ter train him a good deal," spoke up the old man. "Oh, I know ye, child; ye need n't try ter hide yer face, unless fur shame of yer company. I have known ye, Jennie, since ye were a baby, and yer good mother would have drownded ye with her tears when ye war born, if she could have looked forward an' seen this night."

Not another word did the two speak, but hastily reentering their sleigh they left Uncle Joe in the road. He adjusted his harness and resumed his journey.

"Ah, James Sarcott, may the Lord open yer eyes before the day of trouble thet ye 're bringin' on yerself shall open before ye."

An hour later Uncle Joe was at home again with Dr. Peters.

. . . . . .

"He, he, he!" laughed David, the hostler, as the muffled form of Jennie disappeared from view, "these youngsters think they 're mighty sharp, but they ain 't got wit enough fur a calf. Now when I war young an' fixed ter take a young lady ter a dance on the sly I didn 't git spied out no sich way as this. I 'll be bound that young Timmons are drunk. He, he, he! Hello! who 's that?" David peered from his little room in the great stable out into the moonlight. A man was walking rapidly away from the boarding-house where the wounded Mike lay. The moon was now far down in the west, and struggling under a patch of cloud. David strained his eyes to see. The form moved on, and presently a rift in the cloud threw the moonlight on its path.

"Great guns!" ejaculated David, "is that Jake Conway, or his ghost?"

The boy was too well known to David for the latter to be mistaken. It was indeed Jake! He went on past Mr. Dill's store, crossed the road, and was soon lost in the shadows.

"Well, what in the nation is the matter?" exclaimed David, scratching his head. "Am I sleepin' or wakin'?" and he rubbed his head again in doubt. He remained rubbing his head and meditating on the possible causes that brought Jake out at this unseasonable hour, for perhaps twenty minutes; then, having satisfactorily explained the matter to himself, to use his own phrase, he "turned in." "He are gone to get Mollie, fur some of 'em are sick," he said as he drew the heavy horse-blankets over himself and tried to sleep.

The north wind had swept the sky clear of clouds,

and as daylight drew on apace, the cold increased. Over the surface of the Branch, Jack Frost was quietly laying his glassy floor upon which the stars looked down to twinkle and smile at their reflected images. The moon was gone. A faint streak in the east betokened the coming dawn. Silence had settled over all the landscape, broken only by an occasional cracking of an ice-crystal or the snap of a timber in some big barn. The boarding-house, roughly constructed and more roughly whitewashed, stood grimly by the main road. Its shutterless windows looked blank and bare, like those of the historic meeting-house at Lexington.

But, see! even as the dawn stretches out from the east a light curling smoke arises from the back part of the rough building. It increases in density. Now it mounts like a huge cloud, and flaming tongues leap from its bosom.

"Fire!" the cry rings throughout the house.

"Fire! fire!" a female form half-clad runs shrieking from the burning building. David springs from his bed. Bob Loomis seizes the great ladder at his shop, and hastens to the scene. The village is soon aroused, but no power can stay the fire fiend. In one half hour the boarding house is a smoldering ruin. The inmates have escaped, thanks to the powerful hands of Bob Loomis and David. Poor Mike, carried to Bob's house, is suffering from excitement, but he has received no further injury.

"Where are them Italians?" asked Bob, when the fire had spent its fury.

Mollie Stormer, Jeft's wife, thus addressed, made answer:

"I do not know. I thought they were in the house."

"Not a skin of them ter be seen," said Bob. "And they are the very chaps at the bottom of this mischief."

"I gave all the Italians leave to go to Hanaford as soon as they quit work yesterday," said Mr. Sarcott. "The fire no doubt has resulted from a defective flue. I hardly believe any one has kindled it."

"Mr. Sarcott," said David, at this moment stepping up and touching his hat, "I seed the Italians go off yisterday in the afternoon, but I seed something else early this mornin', that may make as much light as the fire." The hostler giggled at his supposed wit, while Mr. Sarcott demanded an explanation.

David now related how he had seen Jake coming from the boarding-house not a very long time before the fire broke out, "and," added he, "the boy looked ter me as though he war sneakin' along for fear of bein' seen."

Mr. Sarcott questioned the man closely, but he stoutly averred that there was no mistake. Bob Loomis, however, shook his head, a movement that David noticed.

"Ye kin shake yer head all yer please, but if I could n't tell a chap thet I hev knowed from a baby, and in plain moonlight, too, yer kin chaw me up fer horse feed."

"Mebbe it war Jake," said Bob; "but Jake never lit thet fire."

"Surely not; he had no motive," said Mr. Sarcott, "but we must investigate the matter."

"How comes he are not out here at the fire?" asked David. "Everybody else are."

Mr. Sarcott shook his head and walked away.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT WANDERER.

Eurilda Conway refused to be comforted. She could never consent to Jake's accepting Mr. Sarcott's proposal. Her heroic offer to work out, to work at almost anything, in order that Jake might leave Mr. Sarcott's employ, and pursue his studies, touched Jake to the heart. And now in his own soul arose the great struggle. The picture of the preacher's self-sacrificing life on one hand; the dignity and power of a superintendent of great business interests on the other. Here was a life of labor unappreciated, perhaps soon forgotten—a life that was laughed at as effeminate, useless, idle; a labor whose recompense was to many a matter of charity, and whose object to many more was a mere chimera of the mind. But there was wealth, independence, power. "Mr. Conway," "Superintendent Conway"—how much better these sounded than "Elder Conway"! And then the latter title, too—who would use it? A few old women and some easy-going men. Elder Conway with an old horse and a dilapidated buggy; Elder Conway at the mite society drinking tea; or Elder Conway begging missionary money,

or beseeching the brethren to pay up his arrears. This was what the boy pictured to himself. The high calling of a minister of the gospel; the leadership of men into noble paths, toward lofty thoughts; the molding of young minds; the directing of reforms; the awakening the human heart by the powers of eloquence; the intense satisfaction of transforming character, and of bettering the human race—to these thoughts his companionship of the last few months had not led him.

But oh! to be a man of power! To command here, to sign bank checks there, to be known as a man whose note was good for thousands, to throw the lines from his hands, and to say: "Here, David, put up this horse"—ah, this was a life of real value! Can you wonder, reader, that the boy coveted it?

This struggle began in Jake's mind after he had sought his bed in the little half-story room of the cottage. He loved his sister; he revered the memory of his father. Now and then a bright picture of a preacher's life would break upon him, but vanish quickly, shut out by the other. Then came the thought, should he break Eurilda's heart, and ah! should he disregard the last request of his father? But he would have the power to make Eurilda happy, and his mother, too. What could his father have wished more than this?

He called to Eurilda, whose little room was not far from his own, and from which he could hear an occasional sob. And when Eurilda answered, he tried to convince her how foolish she was, and how much better Mr. Sarcott's plan would turn out to be.

But Eurilda could not be convinced, and the boy ceased to talk to her. He courted sleep, but it would

not come, for now a new cause of unrest had entered his thoughts.

The more he thought on Mr. Sarcott's plan, the more intensely he desired to pursue it. He soon became conscious of a fear as intense as the desire itself—a fear that something might happen to prevent the consummation of the plan. He thought over the possible causes. There might be some one else whom Mr. Sarcott would find. How about Andy Pike? He was a bright boy, and had aspirations toward an education.

May be the project might fall through, and so Mr. Sarcott not need him. These and a hundred similar thoughts chased each other through Jake's mind and banished sleep. At last a thought came into his head in which he seemed to realize his failure. What if Mike should tell Mr. Sarcott about that gambling? A cold sweat stood upon Jake's forehead and he sat up in his bed. Why had he not thought of it before? Alas, here was his doom! Somebody would surely tell Mr. Sarcott. Then what? A reliable young man—this was what Mr. Sarcott wanted. Was a gambler reliable? But what did Mr. Sarcott care for a game of cards? Nothing; but then—there was the money interest. Who would want to trust a gambling clerk? So oppressive became the thought that the boy arose from his bed. He peered out into the moonlight night and could see a light shining from a window in the rough house where he knew Mike lay. Who was attending him? It must be Jeff Stormer. If Jeff could be seen—Jeff would not tell Mr. Sarcott on purpose. But then he might know. The moon's rays fell on the dingy shop of Bob Loomis. Jake saw that, too, and

thought of Bob. But Bob would not tell. Jake felt safe about that. If he could only see Jeff. He longed to know how much Jeff knew. Why not see him?

The thought grew upon him. Jeff was rather dull. Jake could easily frame an excuse for coming at that hour of the night. The boy resolved to go. He listened to see if his mother or Eurilda were awake. He heard no sound. Hastily dressing himself he slipped down the stairs and out of the cottage. The snow creaked beneath his feet, while the keen, frosty air made his ears tingle and turned his breath to vapor. He walked rapidly up the road, crossed it opposite Mr. Dill's store, and approached the boarding-house. He was just stepping into its shadow and had nearly reached the stairs that ascended the building on the outside, when he became aware of approaching footsteps. He crouched close to the stairs and beheld two men walk to the rear of the house. Their walk and garb showed plainly that they were two of the Italians. An impulse moved Jake to ascend the stairs. Unfortunately he did so too soon. The men had halted, and as Jake went up a step or two he exposed himself fully to their view. An exclamation of surprise escaped them, and they walked quickly away. At a distance Jake saw them stop and talk a moment, then separate. A strange feeling came over the boy. He essayed the stairs, but his courage failed him. Jeff might not be there. He had not thought of that. His resolution gave way and he started at once back toward the cottage. Ah, Jake, the night has eyes!

The boy returned stealthily to his bed and finally fell asleep. He awoke at the alarm of fire, but was so terrified at what he had done and the possibilities con-

nected with it that he remained at home. And Mrs. Conway and Eurilda, who were both afraid, were glad to have him do so.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ITALIAN STORY.

Great was the excitement that stirred the neighborhood when the news of the fire became known. The afternoon that followed it saw a lively scene in the village. Its one street was lined with vehicles of every description. Groups of men and women stood around the ruins of the boarding-house and discussed numberless theories of the disaster.

Poor Jeff Stormer, who had lost everything, walked here and there, viewing the desolation with an air of utter hopelessness. Now and then a sigh escaped him, as, wandering among the ashes, he picked up some charred relic whose former place in the household furniture he too well recognized. Sometimes he stood with his hands in his pockets and seemed half dazed. "Alas for the rarity of Christian charity." Jeff found in the hour of his calamity more criticism than sympathy.

"Guess he 'd better stayed on his farm," said one.

"Wanted to make money a little too fast," said another.

"I reckon Jeff will git some of his airs taken out of

him now," remarked an elderly farmer; "he war beginnin' ter git pretty high-toned."

"Guess he 's nothing but his bare land left," added some one else; "he can have a chance to see how beginning over goes."

The crowd around Mr. Dill's store grew larger as evening came on, and the little side room was evidently enjoying the company of a great many visitors. Some body was certainly profiting by the calamity.

Nothing had, as yet, been revealed to connect any one with the fire, and speculations continued to multiply as drink flowed more freely at Mr. Dill's. Mr. Sarcott had wisely cautioned both Bob and David to say nothing of Jake's untoward night visit. In the meantime, be said, he would investigate the affair carefully.

The Italians had all come back from Hanaford and several of them were in the company at Mr. Dill's. Their companion, the assailant of Mike, was languishing in the Hanaford jail. They drank freely among themselves, and talked glibly in their own language. They were especially interested in the conversation about the fire, and listened eagerly to all that was said upon that subject. The leader of the band, who seemed to understand more English than the rest, turned frequently to his followers and talked volubly as if in explanation of some of the talk. His efforts were accompanied by certain gestures and signs of emphasis that highly pleased his hearers.

It was during one of these interpretations that a woman entered the store. A glance at her dark eyes, her olive complexion, and the careworn look of her face, revealed Mary, Mr. Sarcott's housekeeper. She came upon some errand, and Mr. Dill hastened to wait

upon her. While he was thus engaged the earnest voice of the Italian fell upon her ear and she moved down the great store-room to a point nearly opposite the door that led to the saloon. Just inside stood the speaker, to whom Mary, slightly tipping her fur bonnet, listened very intently. A sarcastic smile played upon her features as he concluded; but without a word she turned away and dispatched her business with Mr. Dill. As she passed out of the store, the look upon her face would have attracted an artist. Something certainly had pleased her.

Hardly had she left the store before Mr. Sarcott entered.

"Whew, Dill! you 're full here to-night," he remarked, taking his way directly to the bar-room.

"Yes," answered the little man, rather nervously, "and I am glad you have come in. They make so much noise. I am half afraid some of them will get to quarreling again. And Jimmy is so busy behind the bar he could n't prevent an accident if he should try." Jimmy was Mr. Dill's bar-tender.

Mr. Dill's look was that of a man half disgusted with the business, and, indeed, had it not been for his fear of Mr. Sarcott, it is likely that he would have backed out of the saloon enterprise then and there.

Mr. Sarcott paid no attention to Mr. Dill, but stood in the door of the bar-room eyeing the company assembled there. Bob Loomis sat tipped back on a chair smoking a pipe, but no grog had passed his lips that night.

The large Italian soon caught sight of Mr. Sarcott, and a pleased expression settled on his face. He ad-

dressed something in his own language to his companions, then approached the magnate.

"Well, Adolfo," said the latter, "you fellows don't seem to be satisfied with your Hanaford spree. You are making up for it here, I suppose. Take care that you don't get too drunk to work to-morrow."

"No drink in Hanaford, Mr. Sarcote. All go to see Henri. He shut up in big jail. No make money for wife. Much bad trouble, Mr. Sarcote."

"Went to console Henri, did you?" returned Mr. Sarcott. "Well, he 'll need some consolation before he gets through. Take care that you don't get into more trouble on his account."

"Other man get into trouble," rejoined Adolfo, "more trouble bigger Henri."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Sarcott.

"Other man keep with Henri in jail by and by; other man much bad, worse Henri. Make big fire last night. Him go jail, too," and here the Italian motioned with his hand toward Hanaford.

Mr. Sarcott was puzzled. The Italian saw this, and ventured to take him lightly by the arm, uttering the one significant word "Come!"

"What do you want, Adolfo?" asked Mr. Sarcott, hesitating.

"Come!" said the Italian again. "No speak loud here. No want him to hear," added he, indicating Bob with his head.

They passed to the rear of the store, and though no notice was taken of the whole transaction by most of the company, yet the remaining Italians saw it and exchanged glances.

The two arrived at the extreme end of the large store-room and took shelter behind a large box.

"Look, Mr. Sarcott," whispered Adolfo, "much talk in saloon. Men talk great much. Nobody know who make fire. Look! Adolfo know!"

"You know?"

"Yes."

"Well, who?"

"Sh!" said Adolfo putting his hand at the side of his mouth and letting his voice fall to a whisper, "sh! big boy make fire. Big Jake!"

Mr. Sarcott was thunderstruck. "How do you know?" demanded he, in a loud voice.

"Sh!" said the Italian again, as if afraid of being overheard, "no talk so loud. Adolfo no tell lie. Jake make fire."

"How do you know? Speak!" said Mr. Sarcott, angrily.

"How know?" asked the Italian, "Know easy. Carlo and Pietro see him."

This testimony, according so closely with David's story, astonished Mr. Sarcott more then ever, but he remained calm.

"Why, Adolfo," said he, "why would Jake do such a thing as that?"

The Italian shrugged his shoulders, as he answered:

"Me think he much mad with Mike, 'fraid Mike tell, play much card with Mike. Burn Mike up. Mike tell. Dead man no can tell."

Had it not been for David's statement, Mr. Sarcott would not have given the slightest credence to the Italian's story. He was moved, however, by the singular circumstances to make a further investigation.

Without telling Bob of his interview with Adolfo, he summoned that worthy and drew from him the entire truth concerning Jake's card-playing with Mike. He then went immediately home.

His household had all retired, and he repaired at once to his big room.

"Well, well, this is a mystery," remarked he to himself, as he took the tongs and stirred the fire. "And yet not so much of a mystery either. I'll be bound that those Italians are at the bottom of the whole affair, and are blaming it on Jake because the boy was seen skylarking around the boarding-house. I wonder what in the wide world took him out there that night."

The big man of the village sat silently watching the coal fire. The clock on the marble mantel chimed midnight, and still he sat thinking. It chimed one, and still he sat by the grate, resting his head upon his hand.

At last he arose and began to walk the floor, at the same time beginning as usual to soliloquize.

"There is a chain of circumstantial evidence," said he, "strong enough to convict that boy of arson; but pshaw! he is as innocent as I am. But," said he, with a peculiar smile, "this apple has fallen especially for me to pick up. Here is an affair that has certainly happened to favor my suit. I think the Lord must have a hand in it." At this remark he broke out into a laugh. "I have been more than usually fortunate of late," he added. "I wonder if Gabriel has n't made a mistake and singled me out for one of his saints." At this he laughed again. The laugh on his face had hardly passed before it was followed by a look that in

daylight would have passed for one of shame. "It is a little mean," continued he, "and no doubt will cost the widow some tears, but I will have to work it a little—just a little." Mr. Sarcott paused ; he thought he heard a low, sarcastic laugh. He listened intently. "No," he concluded, "it is the wind. I declare, I am afraid I am becoming subject to nervousness."

He picked up his lamp and retired to an adjoining room. As he turned his back a tall figure peered into the large room ; two black eyes gleamed in the light of the dying coals for a moment and then disappeared.

The excitement in the village arose to fever heat, when, in less than a week from its occurrence, Jake Conway was arrested on suspicion of having kindled the fire.

Uncle Joe hastened to the Conway cottage to comfort the well nigh frantic widow and her daughter. Aunt Samantha, though prostrated again over the news, had urged him to come.

At the cottage he met Mr. Sarcott.

"I have perfect confidence that the boy is innocent," said Mr. Sarcott to the old man, "and I will go his bail."

"Innercent!" said Uncle Joe, "innercent! he are as innercent as I am." The good old man had never bewailed his own poverty so much before, for he inwardly wished that he might prevent Mr. Sarcott from lending the family any financial aid whatever.

With a sorrowful heart Jake accompanied the sheriff of the county to Hanaford, where, at a preliminary examination, he was bound over, Mr. Sarcott going his bail.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW DISASTER.

Mr. Sarcott sat alone in his large library. He had just returned from the Justice's office, where Jake had been bound over to answer to the charge of arson.

"Now," said the village magnate, as he seated himself in his big chair, "now I will change the language of old Shakespeare a little, and say: 'now is the summer of my content;'—things could not have happened better if I had ordered them myself. Ha! ha! ha! Providence must surely be smiling on a poor sinner. I am afraid he has deserted the cause of old Dad Sales, and taken up with one of the unwashed. I believe the Bible says he is no respecter of persons, whatever the Craggy Hill saints may think. Ha! ha!" And the scheming man chuckled and rubbed his hands.

He finished this performance with a rousing clap, as though emphasizing some new scheme that had suggested itself to his fertile brain. Then he arose, and, lighting a cigar, he began his old habit of pacing the room. Now and then he would stop as he walked, fill

his mouth with smoke until his cheeks were distended, then blow a deep blue cloud toward the ceiling. As this cloud settled slowly, he would fix his eyes upon it with deep contemplation until it scattered, when he would resume his walking.

He continued to walk thus until he had finished his cigar, then, stepping to the head of the stairs, he called Nannie. The bright-eyed child quickly answered his summons.

"Nannie," said Mr. Sarcott, "put on your cloak and run over to Bob Loomis's for me."

"All right, papa; shall I tell him you want him?" asked the child, all in one breath.

"Not so fast, Nannie," said Mr. Sarcott, a little impatiently; "wait until you know my errand."

Nannie looked a little crestfallen, but said no more, as she stood awaiting her father's pleasure.

"You go," said her father, "to Bob's house; if he is not there go to the store, and if he is not there go to his shop; at any rate, find him and tell him I want to see him at once."

The child did as she was directed, and Mr. Sarcott seated himself at his table with his head resting upon his arm. He began his old habit of talking to himself.

"I must manage to get the boy's trial put off as long as possible," said he, half aloud. "I must prolong the widow's trouble a little. She hardly feels dependent on me yet. I know these women. She will be easily brought to consent when she finds it is the only thing that will save the boy from disgrace." Here Mr. Sarcott gave his accustomed chuckle.

"*Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.*"

The words came clear and sharp, and Mr. Sarcott jumped instantly to his feet.

A low, sarcastic laugh that might have been the echo of his own chuckle, came from the outer hall, and grew fainter as the great man started toward the door. It seemed to linger on the stairway, and at last to blend, he knew not how, with the breeze that came from the cold hall below, until, as he stood at the top of the stairs listening, he became conscious of nothing more unusual than a strange ringing in his ears and the low moaning of the wind without.

"Pooh! that's that half-crazy Mary again," said he, looking a little foolish. "I suppose she thinks she has prodded my conscience with a sharp theological spear now. Ha! ha!"

He returned to his chair, but somehow his mental state had undergone a great change. He tried to feel unconcerned—to persuade himself that the voice had not disturbed him—but his actions belied his attempts. His complacency was gone. A vague sense of insecurity oppressed him. The room seemed dark. And why not? for to him it was invaded by the veritable shadow of his own meanness. He lit another cigar, and waited impatiently for Bob.

That worthy was found by Nannie contentedly smoking his pipe in Mr. Dill's store. He received the message with an air of indifference; but bidding the child inform her father that he would come in a few minutes, he knocked the ashes from his pipe and started toward his home.

I will leave the reader to judge for himself why Bob took the trouble to array himself in another and more respectable suit of clothes before going to the big

house. He did not seem to be in a very good humor while effecting this transformation. His wife ventured to inquire about the disturbing influences.

"Laury," said Bob, in reply to one of her interrogations, "it are enough ter make a saint swar ter see the tricks of Jim Sarcott. I know he hez got the deadwood on us, and if I ain't mistaken he will soon hev it on all Risin' Branch. Talk about yer big men! I war 'fraid enough all my life of Jim Sarcott, 'cause I never got close to him till lately; but, Laury, if his solidness ain't gone ter shadder as I come nigh onter it, I'll never hit an anvil agin. Mebbe he thinks I are goin' ter be his cat's paw without hevin' sense enough ter know it; but you wait."

"Laury," who well knew how Bob had, in former days, regarded Mr. Sarcott, and who knew, too, a little of Bob's habit of boasting, was nevertheless puzzled about his speech.

Bob continued: "I see yer not able ter take it in, Laury; but give it a good thinkin' now, and listen. I've been meditatin' some this winter, and I hev had my eyes open, too. Sarcott are continerly scoldin' me fur not keepin' them Italians inside the traces, yet he are sellin' likker ter them every day; and what's meaner, doin' it all in Dill's name. Here's not a year gone yit, and he's got half this neighborhood in his fist—holdin' of mortgages and the like. One feller hez been about killed, and poor Jeff Stormer are broke up. They say his Mollie are nigh about crazy. And that ain't the meanest. He are tryin' his level best ter squeeze the Conways ter the wall, just so the widder will hev ter marry him or go to the poor-house. I feel like kickin' myself ter think I ever got inter his

clutches; but mind yer, Laury, I am not the miserablest humin bein' in this yer town, as folks hez allus had it. I hev been ter blame gittin' Jake inter this scrape and I am goin' ter be ter blame gittin' him out." At this remark Bob gave his boot a tremendous stamp, and continued for a while to beat the floor with his heel, as if grinding the life out of a prostrate enemy. He then took his way to the Sarcott mansion.

"The old man are up ter some scheme agin, and wants my help, I 'll be bound," said Bob, as he walked along. "He 'll be apt ter get it, too; but it is goin' to be after my own fashion, see if it ain't."

He had arrived by this time at the rich man's door, and, ushered by Mary, he was soon standing in Mr. Sarcott's presence.

"Well, Bob," was that gentleman's greeting, "we are having rather exciting times."

"Yes, sir," answered Bob, taking the chair toward which Mr. Sarcott motioned. "Things hez been a little lively, thet 's a fact; but they are gittin' considerable quieter."

"Have you been down to the widow's to-day?" asked Mr. Sarcott.

"Yes," answered Bob, "and they 're in a terrible bad shape. The widder is well nigh sick abed, and the girl ain't much better. They 're takin' it powerful hard."

"Of course the widow believes the boy innocent?" queried Mr. Sarcott.

"Innercent?" repeated Bob, emphatically. "Is there any as does n't believe it?"

"Well, I do not know about that, Bob," replied Mr. Sarcott; "of course, we who know him hardly

believe him guilty; but I suppose some do. At any rate, he has been unfortunate enough to get himself accused, and as a result must stand his trial. What do you suppose took him out about the boarding-houses that time of night, Bob? David is positive that he identified him."

"For the life o' me, I can't tell, sir," answered the blacksmith. "In course I can't gainsay what David swars ter; but I'll venture to say if that boy war out, there will some reason fur it come out by and by."

"No doubt of it," rejoined Mr. Sarcott; "but now, since he has been bound over and I have gone his bail, I'll tell you what I want: I want you to persuade Jake to run away before his trial."

"What! and jump his bail?" asked Bob.

"Yes," answered Mr. Sarcott; "I am good for the bail, but I would like to have the boy gone."

Having come expecting that his employer would propose some new scheme of villainy, Bob did not manifest much surprise at this extraordinary desire. He merely asked, "When are his trial?'

"It is set for the last week in June," answered Mr. Sarcott; "about four months yet."

"The old scamp are at the bottom of havin' it staved off that long," thought Bob; but he asked aloud, "How am I goin' ter persuade him ter run off?"

"Oh, that will be easy enough," was the reply. "You see there is certainly a strong chain of circumstantial evidence against the boy. The Italian is positive that he saw him, and so is David. He admits himself that he was out, and gives no satisfactory reason; and they say that he was not on good terms with Mike. Now you persuade him that he is likely

to be convicted, and he will be glad to get away. You may tell him that you heard me say that the Grand Jury might possibly add the charge of attempt at murder to the indictment."

"Thet would be orful," remarked Bob.

"It would, indeed," continued Mr. Sarcott, "and I have good reasons for wishing the boy to forfeit his bail. What these reasons are, will appear in due time. I want you then, Bob, to persuade the lad away. You can do it; and as for compensation, you know I never forget my friends."

"I reckon I kin do the business fur ye, sir," remarked Bob, wearing a smile of apparent satisfaction. "In short, I'll see ter it thet the boy gits away. When do ye want him fur ter go?"

"Any time before the trial, Bob. Perhaps you had better not be too fast about it; and remember—you have not talked with me about this matter at all, you understand. And be sure to keep him away till after the time set for trial."

Bob nodded assent, and Mr. Sarcott showed him out.

The smith took his way home again, in no pleasant frame of mind.

"The old rascal!" he exclaimed, as soon as he had seated himself once more in "Laury's" presence; "didn't I tell yer he war up to some meanness? And he thinks I don't see through it. Laury, look at me right straight in the face. Look at this yer forrid." Here Bob tapped himself on the aforesaid "forrid" with his forefinger. "Laury, I ain't a clear igit yit, if I have ben countid shiftless. The idear of him thinkin' that I don't know why he wants Jake ter skip

out!" A look of the utmost contempt settled on the swarthy face, and did not leave it while he was relating the interview to "Laury."

Bob's face remained nearly as dark as the gloomy winter day, that had now almost run its short course.

A great change had taken place in the weather. A warm wind blew up from the south, and, kissing the snow, began to soften its cold heart. Rain began to fall, slacking up at intervals, but leaving the earth wrapped in a disagreeable fog. Drip, drip, drip, from roofs, from trees, from the great coats of chronic visitors who were gathering early at Mr. Dill's saloon. The fog grew thicker, and poured out its water without rising. At intervals the dull note of the hoot-owl sounded in the low forest lands along the branch.

"Whew!" exclaimed Bob, as he crossed the road and took his accustomed way to Mr. Dill's; "whew! it are goin' ter break up, and if the Branch ain't boomin' 'fore mornin' I 'll never lift a sledge agin." The smith waded through the melting snow until he had almost reached the saloon door, when suddenly, as if seized by a sudden impulse, he re-crossed the road and took his way toward the Branch. A heavy oilcloth suit protected him, and he strode on with the air of one who enjoyed the extreme dampness. The night had nearly come. The few village lights served but to reveal the presence of the mist. The sound of rising waters fell distinctly on the blacksmith's ear.

"The ice are goin'," said he; "if it should bust the dam at Craggy Hill, we 'll git a fine lay out down here. But it are good and strong."

Bob stopped at the edge of the Branch, and gazed into its rapidly increasing volume. Just beyond arose

the railroad embankment, vague, indistinct, and growing more so in the thickening darkness.

Taking off his rubber hat, Bob managed to light a match inside of it, and apply it to his pipe. The sound of rain, the roar of waters, and the signs of a gathering freshet have a charm for some people. Bob seemed to be of the class. He stood puffing his pipe beside the Branch, while the outlines of his figure grew fainter as the night enwrapped him. With no motive but to enjoy the situation, he stood a long time in the same spot, the rain falling heavily from above and the snow melting as rapidly below. The darkness increased as the snow disappeared, and when Bob had finished his pipe it was with difficulty that he could discern the long line of embankment beyond the Branch.

"Hi!" said he, a thought suddenly striking him, "a big flood might make Jim Sarcott squirm—if it should damage that bank over yonder. 'T would n't be no more nor a judgment onter him. He are so greedy fur money! And a mis'rable way he are takin' ter git it, too. Do n't make no diff'rence ter him who suffers. Hark! what on airth!"

Bob had been walking slowly through the slush as he mused, and now he paused and listened intently. A sound like a coming thunderstorm swept down the Branch. Bob raised his eyes and looked upward. The rain still fell heavily, but no tempest was in the air.

"Great!" said the smith, as the sound grew louder, "if the road were done I 'd say a train was comin'; but listen!"

There was no mistaking that muffled roar.

"It are water! The dam are gone! Ho—o—o!"

shouted the excited man, flinging away his rubber coat and bounding toward the village. "Ho—o! the dam are gone!" He paused a moment for breath. "And it never went of itself with this little rain," said he, as he rushed on. "Hello! everybody! Hey—o—!"

"Ha! ha! ha! hey—o—o—o—!" The shrill tones cut through the rain and fog like a knife. Bob stopped as if a bullet had met him. That was not the echo of his shout.

"Ha! ha! hey—o—o—o!" The sound was not ten rods away. Bob strained his eyes to make out what the indefinable figure that now loomed up in the darkness might be.

"Oh, ho! ho! listen to it coming. It will wash the money out of the bank. Yes, my money and Jeff's. He's buried it in there. Hurry up! Oh, come on!"

"Did n't I know it?" almost shrieked Bob, as he leaped toward the flying figure.

"Let me alone! I say, let me go!" screamed the maniac. "I know you, Bob Loomis. He sent you to stop me, but you are too late. Ha! ha!"

"We will be drownded!" cried Bob, while his sturdy arm encircled the raving Mollie. The screams of the demented woman, the pouring rain, and the steady roaring of the approaching flood, wrought Bob almost to distraction. Mollie struggled fiercely in his iron grasp.

"He got us to move to town," she screamed, "and he has taken all our money and buried it in that bank. He burned the house to get it, and it's all buried there. I knew the water would wash it out. And this was such a good night! Ha! ha! ha! I put

the powder there a week ago. How the rocks flew! Let me go, I say Bob Loomis, let me go."

Mollie had not half finished this speech before Bob had divined the truth. Crazed at the loss occasioned by the fire, and laboring under a strange delusion, Mollie Stormer had concealed a keg of powder in the dam at Craggy Hill. With all the acuteness of a maniac, she had chosen this opportune night to explode it.

A cool mathematician would not have reached surer results. For miles down the valley the flood tore away the embankment, destroying, in a single night, all the work of the previous autumn. Alas for Mr. Sarcott's plans! He was a heavy loser, and, worse than all, the opening of the railroad was indefinitely delayed.

"I had a terrible time gettin' her ter the village," remarked Bob next day, as he exhibited his lacerated arms to Laury. "If Jim Sarcott hez made anything in enticin' them two mortals ter leave their home and play inter his pockit, I'd like ter see it."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FLIGHT.

How did Mollie Stormer ever succeed in blowing up the dam breast at Craggy Hill? Nobody ever knew. Nobody ever had seen her go up there; but after the disaster, Mr. Dill found, on investigating, that a keg of powder was missing from his store. Poor Mollie was hopelessly insane, and had been sent to the asylum at Carterville.

The blow fell heavily upon Mr. Sarcott, and Mary, his housekeeper, did not lose the opportunity to thrust a spear into his side.

Silent and moody, the great man had just finished his breakfast, and sat tapping his coffee cup with an air of abstraction. It was about a week after the events of the last chapter. Jennie and Nannie had gone upstairs, and Mr. Sarcott was for a moment alone. Mary entered, and fixed her great dark eyes upon him.

"Well, James, Providence must have quit smiling on poor sinners, eh?" A wicked smile played about the woman's mouth.

"Go about your business!" returned Mr. Sarcott,

"and do not be too exultant, my black and tan saint; time may change the twist on your lip."

"Time works wonders," rejoined Mary, with her usual sarcasm.

"Yes," answered the magnate, "and it will work wonders that you are not looking for. I suppose you certainly think that Pharaoh is drowned in the Red Sea now. Had n't you better strike up the Song of Moses? Come, do."

"People will hear the song of Moses sooner than you think," retorted Mary; "in the meantime, defy the Lord, harden your heart, for your stubborn eyes refuse to look ahead to the death of the first-born."

"Yes," replied Mr. Sarcott, "that 's a pretty God that you worship—a God that chastises his children, and then hardens their hearts so that they must repeat the offense! I believe in a different kind of God. How like a fool you will look when you see that a temporary disaster has not materially injured my plans. I may be able to cure you of some of your senseless superstitions yet; but I doubt it."

"So do I," returned Mary, emphatically.

Mary had read Mr. Sarcott aright. His mind was in a Pharaoh-like state of defiance.

"I will make things work," said he to himself, half savagely, as he returned to his library. "What 's the use of my giving away now and then to these foolish superstitions? I declare they affected me last night. But pshaw! if I can show some of these leatherheads that a miserable sinner can beat their Providence in a fair and square race, it will do more good than all their cant."

Mr. Sarcott had hardly uttered this sentiment, when he felt himself possessed by a vague fear—a fear that

his insolent defiance might provoke some kind of wrath. Yes, but whose?

"Pshaw!" said he, picking up his favorite "Age of Reason," "there is no personal God. Tom Paine killed him dead forty years ago."

He continued reading for an hour, fortifying his unbelief; but when he lay the book down and mentally examined his ramparts, they were, he felt, weak and insecure. How strange that he should still defy the power of God!

While Mr. Sarcott sat reading, Bob Loomis was preparing to visit Jake Conway. The family in the cottage were certainly enduring their Gethsemane. A few of the faithful brethren at Craggy Hill had not deserted them, but alas! in this hour of deep affliction many of their town neighbors withheld their sympathy. Some had even gone so far as to make their adversities the subject of unkind remark.

Strange to say, a friend had arisen whom, in past years, the family had never dreamed of regarding in that role. It was Bob Loomis. So changed had he become in the last few weeks that the Conways could hardly credit their senses. He had dropped his rude way, ceased almost entirely to swear, and never lost an opportunity to do the widow a kindness. It was evident that some influence was rapidly transforming Bob. Mrs. Conway mused upon it, and wondered. Instead of the repugance that his occasional visits formerly awakened, the family now felt cheered by his coming. Indeed, since Jake's arrest, Eurilda had come to watch for him with a certain degree of anxiety. Next to Uncle Joe's, no face was now more welcome than his. To this rude and low-born man, the Conways looked for a sympathy

that no previous experience had shown him to possess. Yes, something was transforming Bob.

On this particular morning, Eurilda, looking through the window, saw Bob approaching.

"Oh, good!" she exclaimed; "there comes Bob; it seems good to see some one from town who cares for us."

"If there 's anything that Laury could do fer ye," said Bob to Mrs. Conway, after announcing that he wished to see Jake, "she will be glad ter do it."

"Nothing, Bob, thank you," said the widow, "but if you find any new clew, oh, Bob"— here she broke entirely down.

"Never you mind, Mrs. Conway," said Bob, "this thing is goin' ter come out all right; and now all I want of yer a minute is ter listen ter me, both yerself and the darter there. What I tell yer I want yer ter tell to no livin' mortal, unless it are Daddy Sales."

Mrs. Conway and Eurilda promised, though in much surprise.

"Now, then," said Bob, "yer will be diserpinted, for it ain't infermation what I 'm goin' ter give away. All I want of ye is ter give yer consent ter Jake's goin' away fer awhile."

"What! Oh, Bob, where?"

"Be calm, both on yer. I kin tell yer no more. All I ax is that yer trust ter me. I have a plan. Jake will be a clear man, and somethin' else 'll happen that yer will thank God fur the longest day yer live. I want Jake ter go away as if he war skippin' out. Mind yer, he will not jump his bail. Do n't trubble yer conshence. I 'll see thet he are here fur trial; but I want him ter skip out next week."

Astonished at this strange request, the widow and Eurilda were almost speechless. At any other time it would have been doubtful if their consent would have been given. Their desperate case, however, and their confidence in Bob, led them to give it. And when they had given it, they wondered in their hearts, and were more and more mystified.

Jake and Bob walked away together. The former had just returned from the barn. They took their way across the fields, now bare of snow, but still extremely wet. A few song-birds had ventured, thus early, back to the leafless woods. A few saucy jays were quarreling in the trees, and here and there a crow cawed from some high oak.

On a dry knoll in the woods the two sat down, and Bob revealed his plans.

"But I can't for the life of me see why I should run away," said Jake.

"Just wait, boy, a little, can't yer? I ain't done yit. Now keep yer ears open. It is plain why Jim Sarcott wants yer to go away. He thinks that, hevin' jumped yer bail, yer won't come back—at least not very soon. He wants yer mother to be as dependent on him as possible. When yer gone he'll visit yer mother, and, findin' her seeminly helpless, will offer ter pay off that store debt at Dill's. Yer know yer have made a big one there this year. He'll do this, expectin' that, as yer mother has given up all hopes of yer help, that she'll feel it her dooty ter marry him, part fur the sake of a home fur Eurilda, and part ter pay his kindniss. Now, boy, you go, and when he pays that bill, I'll signal yer ter come back all of a suddint. Do yer take it in?"

"Maybe he 'll lift the mortgage, too," added Jake, rather earnestly.

"Never yer mind that mortgage, boy. Do n't try to know too much. I ax yer, do yer take in my scheme?"

The reader need not be surprised if Jake was puzzled over the casuistry that this scheme presented, nor need he be surprised that, being unable to unravel it, Jake, to help his mother, as he thought, consented.

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A week after this interview, Jake Conway, with the help of Bob, left the village of Rising Branch at night. The whole neighborhood was excited when his flight became known. "Did n't I tell you?" was on fifty tongues. Mr. Sarcott, as he sought the seclusion of his library the evening after Jake had gone, was greatly elated.

"I tell you what," said he, rubbing his hands and chuckling, "this blacksmith is just my man. He is a regular Michael Lambourne; yes, a regular Lambourne."

"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the sons of men, for in them there is no salvation."

"If that woman is not a ventriloquist," said Mr. Sarcott, starting from his chair, "she is a demon."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE CONWAY COTTAGE AGAIN.

Mrs. Conway and Eurilda sat alone in their little cottage. Six months had wrought a great change therein, but not so great as had been wrought in Mrs. Conway's looks. She had grown perceptibly older. Gray hairs were plain among her dark tresses, and her eyes were red. Eurilda, too, was changed. It was visible in her emaciation. A troubled look, that was not made to be carried by so young a face, nevertheless haunted her expression. Six months—it was a short time, but the cloud that had been settling over the cottage was crammed with care.

Mrs. Conway was basting, and Eurilda was busy at the sewing-machine.

"Oh, Eurilda," said the widow, after some moments of silence, "why am I so impulsive? Why do I not stop to think? I have consented to this strange plan of Bob's, I know not why. I ought to have waited. At least I ought to have seen Uncle Joe. Why did I trust so blindly to Bob, and yet fail to trust more to God!"

"Mamma, do not cry," said Eurilda, tenderly; "I

am afraid we all trust what we can see before we trust what we can not see. It seems so hard sometimes to walk by faith, as Paul says, especially when we think we see a path."

"Bob has changed so in the last few weeks, especially since that man was hurt," said the widow, "that I felt some how he was a friend in need. He would not do us an injury, yet I can not feel wholly at ease. My mind is in a whirl."

"For my part, mamma," said Eurilda, "I consented to Bob's plan, because it will take Jake out of Mr. Sarcott's reach, at least for the present. Oh, I fear him, mamma. I fear that his influence on Jake will keep him from ever following what it was father's last wish for him to follow. Bob was here a few moments yesterday, and he assured me so earnestly that Jake was safe, and would be in no bad company, that I am much relieved."

"Well," replied the widow, "I have trusted Bob now, and, though I feel ashamed to do it, I must trust God for the result. I wish Bob had revealed his plans to me a little more fully."

"The way people are talking makes it a little bad for us," said Eurilda; "but I believe all will be well."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Uncle Joe Sales. He had knocked, but, without waiting, had opened the door and walked in.

His face wore an expression of deep sorrow, which the widow at once connected with his interest in her own affairs. Her face reddened a little, and she betrayed some confusion.

"I suppose you have come to scold me, Uncle Joe, for letting Jake go away," said she.

"Wal, Amelia," replied Uncle Joe, taking the chair that Eurilda handed him, "it war certainly a queer thing fur ye ter do. If Bob Loomis hed told me of it in time, I should hev protestid; but Jake war gone before I knowed it. No doubt Bob thought he war doin' ye a favor; but I'm sure if ye hed made Bob tell ye the plan, as I made him tell it, ye would n't hev give it yer sankshen."

"Why, Uncle Joe, is the plan so bad that Jake would have been deceived? I do not think he would do wrong, if he knew it."

"No, I do n't, ayther," replied Uncle Joe; "but the case is one as must hev presentid a queer shape ter the lad. All he seed, no doubt, was a chance ter relieve ye of difficulty fur a while, and give himself a better chance ter help ye permanintly. So he consinted; but, knowin' Bob's plan, I hope, Amelia, ye won't allow Mr. Sarcott ter render ye any sich help."

Eurilda and her mother were both surprised when Uncle Joe revealed Bob's plan, as he had it from Bob's lips. Mrs. Conway felt more perplexed than ever. Again she reproached herself for acting so hastily. Alas! so many people act first, and then reproach themselves afterward.

"No doubt my looks is what led ye ter ax that question of me?" said Uncle Joe, in a moment.

"What question?" queried both.

"Whether I come ter scold ye," said Uncle Joe. "But I did n't. The truth is, Amelia, while I'm exceedin' sorry about this hull affair of Jake's, I am sorrier about another thing. What has happened is nothing more nor I expectid, and only what I said we could look for. I am only anxious that we do some-

thin' ter check the wickedness thet has begun; but I am afraid we can't."

Uncle Joe, like many other men, sometimes sought encouragement in opinions that agreed with his own. And, like other men, he would seek to direct such opinion, in order that he might get the encouragement. He felt pretty confident that the events of the last two months would prove powerful helps in his efforts to get the church at the village. His remark was intended to draw from Mrs. Conway a confirmatory opinion. He succeeded well, for she replied:

"O, Uncle Joe! I am sure that you will now be able to turn these events into a channel for good. You can certainly show our brethren now the folly of building anywhere but here."

"Mebbe I will be an instrument in the Lord's hands," returned Uncle Joe, with some complacency, "but it 's nateral that I should hev a few misgivin's, especially since Elder Tribbey and them is a fightin' so agin me."

"It is so strange," said the widow, "that Elder Tribbey should oppose this movement so."

"Nothin' very strange, Amelia," rejoined the old man; "he is makin' friends of the 'mammon of unrighteousness,' and he is so blind thet he do n't see that he 's standin' in his own light."

Here Uncle Joe repeated to Mrs. Conway substantially the same story that he had told Aunt Samantha concerning what he had heard at Hanaford.

"I told this ter Elder Tribbey, the other day, Amelia, and what do ye think he said?"

"I do not know."

"It 's no wonder that I am lookin' sad," resumed

Uncle Joe, "fur in all the years that I've been tryin' ter serve God—and that's nigh on ter fifty—I never had one of the brethren ter question my word."

"Has Elder Tribbey done so?" inquired Eurilda.

"Yes, darter," said the old man, slowly, "he has done that very thing. As I war sayin', I told him what I had heard from McCracken and Wale, and says he, 'Brother Sales, I am afraid the devil has been temptin' ye, and ye hev give way. Ye are seekin' honor from men, and want ter have the glory of leadin' a movement ter build a new church in a new place. Ye hev fallin' in ter a grievous sin. I know yer have, fur I heard a story contrary ter yourn not more than a month ago; and now ye are sinful and foolish enough ter try and influence me by somethin' of yer own gittin' up.'"

The old man was silent a moment, and then resumed:

"I was astonished beyond measure. But I was more so ter see how stubborn the Elder war. He would n't listen ter me, but became angry, and said it war a shame that I should set up fer a leader in a generation that had growed away beyond my old idears and notions."

"How strange that is," remarked Eurilda. "Elder Tribbey always used to think we could not get along without you, Uncle Joe."

"No, darter; let me remind ye agin that it are not very strange. I know what is the matter with Elder Tribbey, and who is influencin' him. It are James Sarcott; and now, Amelia, a part of my errand here this mornin' is ter warn ye agin ter keep out o' his clutches. He hez takin' away yer horse, so 's ye can't

go ter church. He knew that ye 'd never git ter go with Colby Haines. He has Colby where he 's tryin' ter git a lot more, and yer among them. He wants Jake ter stay away, and ter be missin' when the time comes fur his trial; fur he wants ter bring ye inter sole dependence on ter him."

Mrs. Conway had bowed her head, and her eyes were full of tears.

"I know what ye are a thinkin' of, Amelia," continued the old man; "he hez a mortgige on yer home; but trust the Lord ter see a way clear out o' this. Do n't let James Sarcott git a mortgige on yer soul. Now, see ter it, and I will help yer ter have Jake come home at once. He are innercent, and will be cleared; and then, with two strong children like Jake and 'Rilda, why need ye ter fear trubble?"

"I know I am a fearful, faithless soul," answered the widow, weeping; "and if I had not been so weak, we would not have seen this trouble."

Uncle Joe made no reply. He only watched with extreme satisfaction the attempts of Eurilda to comfort her mother. At last he spoke:

"I suppose," said he, "that we shall have ter wait till fall before we kin have another meetin' ter decide the question of buildin'. I wos over ter Brother Gimler's yisterday, and I see that Elder Tribbey has about got him convertid to his views. Bro. Gimler has been buyin' some o' them town lots; and fer this his wife are ter blame. By the way, Amelia, what fur a foundation is that they 're layin' up there beyond the store?"

"Have n't you heard, Uncle Joe, that Mr. Sarcott is going to build a large hall there?" answered Eurilda.

"A hall!" said Uncle Joe; "ah, yes, I see; he hez

learned nothin' by kerlamity yit. One would hev thought that Mollie Stormer's explite would hev teached him somethin', but he 's bound ter go on settin' snares till he 's catched and held."

The old man shook his head mournfully, as he took his hat to go.

. . . . . .

"David," said Mr. Sarcott on the evening that followed Uncle Joe's visit, "did you say you saw old Dad Sales down at the widow's to-day?"

"Yes, sir," replied the hostler; "he war there when I come by this forenoon. I seed him hitchin' his horse."

"He is up to some of his saintly nonsense," was Mr. Sarcott's soliloquy. "I will have to go down and make another call. I must undo the old man's work. I must weaken the widow's faith in him, or," he added half aloud, "strengthen it in me." He gave his peculiar chuckle; he thought he heard it prolonged. He listened; "pshaw! it is only an echo." He walked on from the barn toward the house, having given David orders to bring the buggy around to the front. Again he found himself ill at ease. A feeling that what he was about to do was exceedingly mean took possession of him.

"Pshaw! what is the difference? Everybody has to hang his pictures to suit him best. One must manage the world to get the best out of it. And then he will not get much."

"What is best?"

Mr. Sarcott started and turned around. "That girl again! If she would sell her ventriloquism to some traveling show she might make a fortune. This

foolish habit of mine, talking aloud, gives her a good hold on me." He looked about expecting to see Mary, but there was no one around. "Singular!" said he, and resumed his way.

Twilight had melted into night and in the eastern horizon a bright star had poised itself just below the disc of the rising moon. It looked full into Mr. Sarcott's eye, as if to say "I am here; why do you not look at me?" And he did look at it. Who made it? How came it there? The questions came into his mind so suddenly that he almost fancied he heard a voice asking them. There was a voice and it was clamoring at his heart. "Yes, who made them? and yonder moon, and this rolling earth? They are here. They exist. How came they hung thus in space?"

The great man had paused on the step of his house, and somehow his eyes were riveted upon the sky. "They never sprang into being by chance. There is a power behind them." He could not banish the thought nor turn away his eyes from the heavens. "A power! yes, and one that thinks and wills, else why should that star and that moon follow forever the laws of their rising? Why do they hang thus above, never approaching, never receding, never growing brighter or dimmer, except as they follow law?" The fragment of a psalm glided into his mind. He had known it in years agone, and now memory, unsolicited, brought it back and whispered it into his mind. "The heavens declare the glory of God"—and these words were not completed, but were changed into "Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

The rattling of the buggy broke his reverie, and he was glad. "It does make a fellow feel mystified a

little to look at the sky," said he, inwardly. He jumped into his buggy and tried to get rid of his thoughts. "Who made them? Who made them?" kept resounding in his ears until just before he reached the cottage, the sound had changed and he heard only a whippoorwill vigorously calling from the woodland beyond the branch. "Spring is coming," said he, alighting at the widow's door.

"Good evening, Mrs. Conway," said he, as that woman opened the door; "I thought I would quit meriting the reproach of indifference, and call now and then."

Mrs. Conway bowed. She was a little stiff, Mr. Sarcott thought. Eurilda had gone to a neighbor's, and this the magnate was glad of.

Mrs. Conway gave him a chair. He sat down, and remarked playfully: "Well, I see formality begets formality. 'Amelia' sounds more natural, does n't it?"

"Of course," replied the widow; "since you have known me from a girl, I suppose it does." She paused, and there was an awkward silence. Mr. Sarcott broke it.

"Well, to tell the truth, I came down, Amelia, on a matter of business. I am sorry Jake has seen fit to leave home so suddenly. I may say I am both sorry and glad. Sorry for the pain it is causing you, and yet glad for the boy's sake."

"Why glad, James?" asked the widow, quickly, and at the same time losing all her reserve.

"Well," answered Mr. Sarcott, "I may as well tell you a bad piece of news."

The widow was nervous, but she managed to say: "Nothing worse than I have heard, is it?"

"I do not know, Amelia, what new thing you have heard lately; but I know you have not heard this. Dill, it seems, is getting cranky; he professes to think that, now Jake is gone, you will be left without means to settle an account which has been growing through the winter. He was threatening to sue you and attach what little personal property he could lay his hands on, but I persuaded him not to. Now, I am as good at revealing good news as bad. The way I persuaded him was to pay the debt myself. I have no fears of you, Amelia. I know the debt will be paid in your own good time. All I want is to be true to my habits of business, and have you give me your personal note for the amount. It shall never be collected. I will not ask it in my lifetime, and if I should 'shuffle off,' as the poets say, my will shall be found to order the forgiveness of the notes. A little word more, Amelia. I hope, for the sake of old acquaintance, you will not refuse my assistance for a while, for I tell you candidly, Jake will not be in shape to help you much this many a day. I think, now he is gone, he had better stay. I will see that he enters some honorable business, and under an assumed name he may do well until he can be honorably cleared."

"What do you mean, James Sarcott?" asked the widow, her eyes suddenly flashing; "do you mean that Jake can not be honorably acquitted now?"

"Be calm, Amelia," was the reply; "I do mean that very thing. I have no doubt that the Italians kindled the fire; nevertheless, the circumstantial evidence against Jake is strong. I believe the Italians will let the cat out by and by; but I believe as firmly that if Jake stands trial now he will be convicted. One

thing against him is his failure to explain why he was out at all that night."

"He has explained all to me," said the widow, "and satisfactorily, too."

"Well," rejoined Mr. Sarcott, "the law is a thing so uncertain; and another bad thing is this: our new Prosecuting Attorney is a young man, and unusually brilliant. He sees in this case a chance to make a reputation, and he will improve it."

Poor Mrs. Conway! Fear again triumphed over faith. She recalled Uncle Joe's admonition of the morning; but she was powerless to heed it. Oh, if Jake should come back and be convicted! The thought absolutely terrified her. And yet how should she get along if the boy could not help her, and that a great deal? Alas that Eurilda was gone! Alas that a voice had not whispered to the widow when Eurilda went out, a sentiment like that of Paul: "Except these abide in the ship, ye can not be saved." The widow yielded, and signed the notes. She thanked Mr. Sarcott for his kindness, and tried meanwhile to persuade herself that Uncle Joe was mistaken in his opinions. Though Mr. Sarcott remained some time longer, he made no other allusion to this subject. Shortly after Eurilda returned, he left the cottage and proceeded homeward.

"I think I'll soon have affairs in shape," he said to himself as he went; and he gave his accustomed chuckle. "I must look out for any more crazy Mollies, though."

CHAPTER XVII.

A GODLESS TOWN.

Bob Loomis was wrong in ascribing the delay of Jake's trial to Mr. Sarcott's machinations. Indeed the latter was anxious to have the trial come off, for was he not certain that Jake would forfeit his bail? He would pay it and thus strengthen Mrs. Conway's obligations to him. But both Bob and Mr. Sarcott were disappointed. Hardly had the Court of Common Pleas begun its session at Hanaford when the District Judge was taken ill, and the business of the court delayed. As the docket contained but few cases, the business of a neighboring district was pressing, and the judge continued to fail in health, the sheriff of the county declared the court adjourned until October. There was much vexation in Rising Branch when this became known. Every body had counted on Jake's case being settled in June, and took it as a direct insult that the judge had been taken sick.

"Humph!" exclaimed old Sammie Barstow, as he sat on an empty box in front of Mr. Dill's store dis-

coursing to a motley audience, "humph! that 'ere judge hain't no sicker nor I be."

"'T ain't the judge," suggested one of his auditors, interrupting him, "it er them there lawyers. There 's more business in Simpson County nor we kin shake a stick at, and thet pie is got ter be eat afore they commence onto ours."

"Of course it are the lawyers!" exclaimed a long, lean individual clothed in blue jeans, and rolling an immense quid of tobacco in his mouth, "and I kin tell ye which ones, too."

"Who?" demanded the crowd, in one voice, "tell us, Bosey. Yes, Bosey, who?"

Bosey squared himself as if for a conflict; then, shutting one eye, he directed a mouthful of tobacco-juice against the box on which old Sammie was sitting.

"It are Bagster and Coup, them 's the counsels fur that young purp, and they want ter give him more time ter git out o' sight an' hearin'."

"Oh, bah!" returned a number of voices.

"That 's jest what they 're doin'," said Bosey, preparing to bombard the box again.

"See here, Bose Comptin," exclaimed old Sammie, getting down from the box in great wrath, "now thet 's enough o' thet. I want yer ter understand thet I ain't a targit to fire yer terbacker agin."

"Who 's firin' agin yer?" demanded Bosey.

"He ain't come within four feet of yer, Sam," said some one.

"Yes, he hez," said some one else, angrily, "he hez spit on Sam's pants.

"Thet 's a lie!" shouted Bosey.

"Call me a liar?" exclaimed the first speaker, "take that!"

"Hold on! hold on!" and two or three strong hands seized the descending arm, and saved Bosey from the blow.

A general melee now followed, mingled with oaths and angry cursings.

"Oh, James! James!" cried poor little Mr. Dill, who had retreated into the store at the first sound of war, "where is the marshal? Oh, we shall all be shot." The clerk made no reply to his nervous master, but hastened to the door. There was a little scattering at his approach. The fighting ceased; a few oaths, however, fell from the lips of the combatants, like the muttering of distant thunder when the storm has past.

Bosey was wiping the blood from his face when Uncle Joe Sales rode up on his old horse.

"Boys! Boys!" exclaimed the old man, earnestly, "what on airth!"

Bosey and old Sammie skulked away at Uncle Joe's approach. Several others slunk into the store.

"Boys," said the old man to the few who remained, "I hev lived fur fifty years in this neighborhood, and I hev never before seed anything ez disgraceful as this."

"Guess you haven't been in town lately, have you?" remarked a smooth-faced, impudent-looking young man.

Uncle Joe merely eyed the speaker, but deigned him no reply.

"Oh!" exclaimed the old man, raising his eyes toward heaven, and seeming rather to address the sun than any one present, "oh, that Mr. Dill will parsist

in sellin ' this demon drink, ter madden the souls of his neighbors !"

"Dill hain 't sold no likker ter this crowd," exclaimed some one.

"Liquor ! liquor ! who says I sold liquor to these men ?" said Mr. Dill himself, approaching the door cautiously.

"Oh, Mr. Sales," said he, as his eyes fell upon Uncle Joe, "I am so glad you have happened by. If these men are in liquor they must have got it up at the other place." Mr. Dill here indicated his meaning with his head.

"Other place ! other place !" exclaimed Uncle Joe, in great astonishment. "Hez this Prince of the Power of Fire fixed himself at another place in this village ?"

"I think the old man must have got behind on the daily news," remarked the smooth-faced young man.

Uncle Joe, as before, paid him no attention, but looking on the rest, said solemnly, and in a voice that commanded attention :

"Boys, I hev ayther read or heerd tell how thet genys, or some such bein 's, could do things in the twinklin ' of yer eye. I heerd how that in a single night they could build a king's palace, or lift one up, towers an ' all, an' carry it over the sea. Of course I never put no faith in them tales. I hev knowed they was only fickshuns. But it seems sometimes as if the doin 's of them genys was bein 's realized in the work of old King Alkerhel. He builds no palace, but in a single night he sets down his foot, an ' lo ! where ther ' was no rum-shop before, behold yer ! ther ' it is. I never visit Hanaford or Carterville, but I see another

groggery added to them as is already ther', and I ain't surprised ter find them any wher'."

"Some genie has set his foot down here since you were up last, old man." The speaker was the smooth-faced young man, but he elicited no reply from Uncle Joe.

"Well, the truth is," said Mr. Dill, leading Uncle Joe aside, and talking in an undertone, "that since poor Jeff Stormer got burnt out he has been in a bad way. He had nothing left at all, and after Mollie went to the asylum, Jeff took a notion to start a little saloon. He thought he could make it pay, at least while they were building the road, and he opened up last week."

"Jeff Stormer!" exclaimed Uncle Joe.

"Yes," replied Mr. Dill, "yonder is his shop," and he pointed to a little square building that had evidently gone up very recently on the site of the boarding house.

"You say," said Uncle Joe, "thet Jeff had nothin' left?"

"Nothing at all," answered Mr. Dill.

"How, then, could he set up a saloon?" asked the old man.

Mr. Dill stammered a little and blushed.

"Ah, oh yes, of course! I said everything. I think there was a little money coming to him, and I suppose he used this."

"Another coil the sarpint hez wrapped around him," said Uncle Joe to himself. "I thought as how he might leave him after swallerin' up his substance, but sarpint-like, he'll kill him afore he unwinds."

Mr. Dill had gone into the store to wait on a cus-

tomer and hither Uncle Joe followed him, made the purchase of a few groceries, and went home.

"It 's the last time," soliloquized the old man as he rode along, "only starn necessity hez compelled me to buy anything where liquid death is dealt out to men." "I know," he continued, "where Jeff got his money and who has parsuaded him ter this; but" (this he said after a long pause), "the judgmints of God are sure, yes, sure, sure."

. . . . . .

Scenes such as we have described were common in Rising Branch during the summer. A keen sense of disappointment was felt by all the villagers at the delay in opening the railroad. The disaster caused by Mollie Stormer was more serious than at first supposed. Every energy, however, was exerted by Mr. Sarcott to complete the road by early winter. He doubled his force of workmen, a new boarding-house was built and given to the charge of Colby Haines, and the village of Rising Branch took on new appointments to accommodate the increasing population. So the summer rolled away and the autumn came again. Gangs of workmen gathered in Jeff's saloon or Mr. Dill's store, smoking and idling away the beautiful nights. A brawl hardly created a passing comment now, but off in the surrounding country the godlessness of Rising Branch had become a proverb. The new dancing hall was almost completed and a grand opening of the same had been announced. The interest in this and in the completion of the road had now well nigh absorbed all there was in the fate of Jake Conway, even the October session of court drew on almost unnoticed.

Thus matters stood when at the close of a Septem-

ber day two strangers arrived in the village. They alighted from the mail hack in front of Mr. Dill's store. One of them was a man of medium size, dressed in a suit of light gray. He was slightly corpulent; his face was cleanly shaven, and he wore a moustache well waxed and curled at the ends. A heavy gold watch chain, which his cut-away coat set off to perfection, crossed his closed vest and reflected the brightness of the brooch he wore in his necktie. He carried a square satchel covered on the ends with large brass tacks. The other man was taller than his comrade and more plainly dressed. He wore a loose fitting suit of navy blue. His eyes were light and his sandy beard came to a sharp point far below his collar. He also carried a satchel, but it was of leather and evidently intended for nothing but wearing apparel. The two men entered the store, around whose door a gaping crowd had collected to see what new thing under the sun would be brought to view by the mail hack. Both were greeted cordially by Mr. Dill.

"Accommodations? Certainly, gentlemen, Rising Branch is second to no town of its size in that regard. Right this way. James, you show them up to Colby's. Just opened out, gentlemen. You'll find everything in apple-pie order there, I assure you. Anything in your line? Ah! well, let me see, well, ah, of course you'll be with us to-morrow. I can talk to you then. This mail business you see has to be attended to, but we can have time enough to-morrow."

The clerk, who seemed impatient to go, now started and was followed by both men. Each of them gave the store a scrutinizing glance as they went out, and

the man in navy blue paused a moment at the side-door and glanced into the bar-room.

The new boarding house had indeed been fitted up in excellent style. Tavern accommodations had been added to it and the two men soon found themselves the guests of Mr. Colby Haines.

"My son, gentlemen," said Mr. Haines presenting a young man of about twenty. "He has charge of things here. You see I am not managing it myself, as the boy and his wife need something to do, you know. He will take care of you in a manner worthy of a growing town, ha! ha!"

The elder Haines disappeared and the young man proceeded to do the host for his guests.

"Ride a little dusty," said he affably, "perhaps you would take something before supper. We've just added a new feature. See here!" He pushed open a green door of lattice work and displayed a small room furnished with all the necessaries of a bar.

The man in navy blue turned to his companion with a significant look.

"Isn't that three?" asked he in a low tone. The other nodded. "Let us see," resumed the first one, "There was one on the left a little after we entered town, and another at the store."

"So much the better for me," remarked the corpulent man.

"What?" said the other, "you don't mean to say that —"

"That's what I sell," responded the party addressed, "and I think I have struck a bonanza here."

"No doubt," answered the man in blue, dryly, "but you will excuse me, I never drink."

"All right," returned the corpulent man, "I can not say that, but my object is mainly to sample. I don't think they can equal anything I have in my stock."

The man in blue shook his head and said, doubtfully, looking around for an auditor:

"If you can sell much it is evident that I can sell little."

"That's where you're just right, stranger." The man turned and confronted Bob Loomis, who sat near the bar-room door smoking a pipe. Bob continued: "As a gen'ral thing, stranger, yer remark whacks the nail on the head, but as ter the case in hand, Bob Loomis will never tack another shoe if either of ye sell much in this town."

"Why not?" asked the sranger.

"Oh, yer go and try, and yer kin test what I tell yer; I can't give yer no reasons."

The stranger looked puzzled, but remarked: "You have a great many saloons for so small a place, have you not?"

"You're right agin," answered Bob. "This un is a new wrinkle; didn't know of it myself till day afore yisterday."

The corpulent man now returned, wiping his lips, and both were conducted by Colby Haines, Jr., to the dining-room for supper.

We will presently follow these strangers separately; but before we do so, we ask you, reader, to walk with them both as they took a morning stroll through Rising Branch village.

They were both on the walk before the boarding-house bright and early.

"Come," said the corpulent man, "we can take

the lay of the land before breakfast. They have a nobby little town here."

"Yonder is the fellow I saw in here last night," said the man in blue; "he is acquainted here, and I will ask him to show us around."

Bob, who had just sauntered out, gladly undertook the office, and the trio started down the street.

"What's this?" asked the corpulent man, whom we must now call Mr. Skain, pointing to a large frame building between the boarding-house and Mr. Dill's store.

"See here!" answered Bob, tapping a large poster that flared from a board fence along the walk.

"Ha!" said Mr. Skain, "a dancing-hall, hey! and bowling alley? Going to have an opening. When?"

"Next week," answered Bob, "and I hope it will be a decent one."

"A decent one! what do you mean?" asked Mr. Skain.

Bob related the event that had occurred at the opening of Mr. Dill's store. Mr. Skain only shrugged his shoulders.

"What a fine house have we there?" said he, pointing to Mr. Sarcott's residence.

"Yes," answered Bob, "and that big one over by the crossing belongs ter Colby Haines, the old man yer seed fust in the tavern last night."

"Here is a fine row of little cottages," remarked Mr. Bowen, the man in blue, as they passed four gothic cottages that had been built during the summer. "Whose are they?" asked he of Bob.

"Well," answered the smith slowly, "I reckon they belong ter the fellows that lives in 'em. Some

chaps as hez moved in from the country since the road war decided on. Most of 'em war farmers afore."

"What do they do now?" asked Mr. Skain.

Bob pointed to the foundations of a large building just in sight, near to the railroad embankment, and not far from the branch.

"Sarcott's new grist and flax mill," said he; "some of these fellers are goin' in there, some are workin' on the road."

"Well!" said Mr. Skain, in some surprise; "I heard they were booming this town, but I am astonished at their rapidity. The accident last spring has not delayed matters much."

"No," answered Bob, "not a great deal. The crazy gal's explite only gave the old man more grit. He has made things livelier than ever."

"The old man?"

"Yes; Mr. Sarcott, who runs things here pretty much."

"Well, my hearty," said Mr. Skain, slapping Mr. Bowen on the shoulder, "there is business here, and no mistake. There is a good day before us; let us go to breakfast."

Mr. Bowen made no reply, but kept turning his head here and there as though looking for something.

"Where is your church?" he asked, abruptly.

Mr. Skain opened his eyes and fixed them sharply on the speaker.

Bob answered his question:

"Church! Why, ther ain't none. Thet is ter say, there ain't none in town. There's one down ter Craggy Hill, three miles from here."

"No church in a town of this size?" exclaimed Mr. Bowen.

"Not a shingle of one," said Bob.

"You go to church, do you, my friend?" asked Mr. Skain.

"Whenever I can," was the reply of Mr. Bowen.

"I don't take any stock in them," said Mr. Skain. "The thing I look for in a town is snap-*biz*', as the boys say."

"You think there is lots of it here, do you?" asked Mr. Bowen.

"Foolish question!" replied Mr. Skain, waving his hand. "If this town is not booming I have missed my guess. One, two, three," said he, holding up his hand, and indicating the number with his fingers. "Oh, ho, old boy! they make business; they do indeed!"

"We'll see," said Mr. Bowen, quietly, as they returned to retrace their steps.

The two gentlemen were not allowed to sit in the common dining-room, where a score or more railroad hands were breakfasting, but had a neat little alcove to themselves. When they had finished their meal, Mr. Skain, complacently picking his teeth, went to the great room door, and stood a while surveying the boarders.

"Money is moving here," said he, as he came back to Mr. Bowen.

"Satan, too," was the dry rejoinder.

The two men separatcd after breakfast, Mr. Skain taking his satchel. He went at once to Mr. Dill's store, and thither we will follow him.

Mr. Dill was in, but evidently seemed annoyed at seeing his visitor.

"Well, now," said Mr. Skain, as he opened the satchel and spread on the counter samples of wines, cordials, gins, and a variety of other liquors, "you can do better with us then with any other firm in the country. See here," said he, leaning across the counter and pulling Mr. Dill toward him, "we can do the handsome thing for you on these. The firm took them in at a bankrupt sale, and we'll give you special prices."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Mr. Dill. "I have no doubt of it, my friend; but you see I can do nothing to-day; money is close, and, and, ah—"

"Sixty days!" said Mr. Skain, eagerly, "and see here: seeing its you, and we want to get our goods in here, you can have ninety."

"Indeed, I cannot buy to-day," answered Mr. Dill, nevously, and with the air of one who feared his tormentor, "indeed, I can do nothing now; you see, ah, I am—that is, I am, or—I mean I must consult—"

"What! are you not alone here?" asked Mr. Skain, glancing around.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Mr. Dill, "but I mean I must consult my means; ah, yes! Indeed, sir, I can do nothing for you to-day."

"But your stock is low," persisted Mr. Skain.

"Well, yes; but then, indeed, sir, I must refuse; I have some reasons—I mean—that is, I mean I have some thoughts of—"

"Selling out?"

"Ah, yes, that is it," replied Mr. Dill; "but it's a matter of business—private, you know."

Mr. Skain closed his satchel in disappointment,

while Mr. Dill, glad to relieve himself, even with a falsehood, bade him a nervous good-bye.

From Mr. Dill's, Mr. Skain repaired to the saloon of Jeff Stormer.

"Why, you have nothing at all in here," said he, unclosing the satchel. "I am just the chap for you, old fellow."

"You 're right there," answered Jeff; "nothin' here—not even money."

"Sixty days," said Mr. Skain; "and let me tell you, old man, you 'll lead everything in this town if you put in these."

Jeff looked at the samples with a longing eye.

"The other fellows have nothing like them," urged Mr. Skain.

Jeff only shook his head, nor could a full hour's pleading on the part of Mr. Skain induce him to invest.

"I will believe what blue-coat says, if I fail here," said he, as in a wearied manner he deposited his satchel in his room at the tavern.

After dinner he sought the bar-room and displayed his samples. Young Colby Haines was in attendance, and no one else was present. The young man's face was red, and he bore marks of having recently indulged in liquor.

"I ain't any 'thority," said he, in a thick voice, as he viewed the samples.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Skain.

"The old man 's the boss," answered young Colby.

"You mean your father?"

"No," replied the young man.

"Who, then?"

"Take a little o' this brandy, stranger, and then give me your ear."

Mr. Skain readily complied, and the loose-tongued host half whispered:

"You see, the old man has got most of us here on the hip."

"What old man?"

"I mean Sarcott."

"What, the contractor?"

"Yes; he's the chap that is really behind these bars, every one of them."

"Where does he buy?"

"Buy! why, man, he is in the big distillery at Hanaford."

"His name does not appear in the firm."

"Oh, he comes in under the 'Co.' He is one of them, sure."

Mr. Skain closed his satchel again, and his face wore a look of disgust.

Toward evening Mr. Bowen appeared, and was immediately hailed by Mr. Skain:

"Been in the country?"

"Yes."

"Sell any fanning mills?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Let's stroll out a little while, and I will explain," answered Mr. Bowen.

The men walked slowly toward the Branch, and when clear out of hearing of the village, Mr. Bowen said:

"Do you know that two-thirds of the men I visited are living on rented farms?"

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and few of them have any money."

"Where are the owners of the farms?" asked Mr. Skain.

"Most of them have moved here to the village."

"Oh, they are the fellows that are building these new houses—some for stores, and one or two for other purposes."

"Yes; a big frame at the lower end for a livery stable."

"And that blacksmith told me the one by it was to be a packing-house."

"And the farms are mortgaged," said Mr. Bowen.

"So?"

"Yes; and the money in railroad stock, or in these new projects."

"Well, you must have been getting at the inside of matters. Do you know who holds these mortgages?"

"One man holds a number of them, and runs the whole village. They say he opposes church."

"He 's none the worse for that."

"He would have a better town if he did n't oppose it, even if you look at it from a money standpoint. Some of these fellows that he has roped in will have lost so much grace, that they will play quits with him at his own game before long. Well, did you find business booming?"

"I found out that the one-man business has killed it for me."

"What a shame," said Mr. Bowen, "that men should allow one man to enslave them thus, and even

while doing so take measures to exclude the institution that would open their eyes to his wiles."

"What institution do you mean?"

"An enlightened church," replied Mr. Bowen, emphatically.

"A church would n't have helped me to sell liquor."

"It would have helped me to sell fanning mills," said Mr. Bowen.

"Oh, pshaw!"

"Yes, it would; legitimate business—I say it boldly—will not flourish in a godless community. If these town men had been where they ought to be, on their farms, I would have another report to make."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SHOT THAT MISSED.

October came. Again the fox grapes ripened along the Branch, and the dry winds rattled the chestnuts to the ground. Craggy Hill was wrapped in the glories of an unusual autumn. Never before had the forest worn such a dress. The dark green hemlocks and the pines made brighter the yellow oaks, and brought a richer crimson from the scattered maples.

"Ther' ain't bin no frost," said Uncle Joe, "and the leaves is just dyin ' of old age."

The woods were full of sound. In the limbs of the shell-bark hickory chattered the squirrel, stopping anon to listen to the pheasant, drumming from some hollow log. The fields gave back the husker's shout, and from the roadside press the laugh of the cider-maker mingled with the grinder's hum. Surrounded by these signs and scenes was the old meeting-house. On that Lord's day nearest to the middle of the month, it stood with open door as if inviting the last church meeting it should ever see. The services of the morning were over, and Elder Tribbey said that now while all the

congregation was represented, the final vote on building ought to be taken.

Father Leeb was present, and arose with difficulty to the floor. He leaned upon his cane and spoke with a feeble voice:

"Brethring, ye all know that Bro. Joseph Sales is sick. I war to his house yesterday, and I found him hevin' a shake; he war terribly anxious ter be here terday, for he had some words ter say. I see he are absent, and I feel as though we orter wait another week till he kin be with us, before we go further. I say this, 'cause I am told as how this vote settles the matter furever."

The old man had hardly paused before Elder Tribbey was on his feet.

"Brethren," said he, "this was the day appointed to take this vote, and I do not see that any one man among us is so necessary that we cannot get along without him. If Bro. Sales is sick, I am sorry; but he has but one vote any how, and from what I can learn that one vote cannot, as matters stand now, change the result. I am anxious that we settle the question, for whatever we decide to do we ought to be at."

"I should think it would be well to hear from Bro. Sales at least," suggested Mr. Gaines, the old pastor. Elder Tribbey gave the old man a fierce look, and he immediately added, "but perhaps, as the season is growing late, we ought not to delay."

There was some murmuring among the congregation, and some one even ventured to suggest that it was hardly fair to push the decision now, even though it was the appointed time.

Elder Tribbey was irritated, but he controlled himself and said: "We all know pretty much what

Bro. Sales' views on this question are. If he were here, he would do no more than to make a plea for his favorite hobby; but pleas go but for little when facts are before us. I know that pretty much every member of this congregation sees, that even if we wanted to, it is too late to talk of building at the village. Land there has risen to fabulous prices, and all desirable places are occupied."

"Well, seems to me," spoke up old Mother Cranshaw, suddenly, "that some of our good brethren might donate a lot. I understand they have several there."

Elder Tribbey and Bro. Gimler both got very red, but affected not to notice the remark.

A general tittering pervaded the congregation, which was stopped by the entrance of two well-dressed strangers.

Leaving the congregation at this stage of its proceedings, we will ask the reader to follow, with us, a buggy that on this same forenoon rolled out of the village and took the road to Craggy Hill.

The mail hack had brought Messrs. McCracken and Wale, of Hanaford, to Rising Branch the preceding afternoon. What they did there we need not ask, but we may be permitted to catch a little of their conversation as they drove along.

"I can not say that I ever felt great interest in religious affairs," remarked Mr. Wale, "but it is plain to me that our religious men are the most valuable to us; I am afraid Sarcott has taken the wrong view of this phase of the question at any rate."

"He has, as sure as you live," added Mr. McCracken, "I claim the church is useful; a man must be addle-

brained not to see that it is above the school in this regard. It is not your smart men that make the best hands; the State prison is full of smart men."

"I don't know but it takes a smart man to get there," said Mr. Wale, laughing.

"It does," replied Mr. McCracken; "but as I was saying, we need something more than smartness to make good workmen. I sometimes wish I were what you might call a spiritual chemist and could analyze some of the stuff they call religion; for I would like to know what element of excellence it adds to the boys down in our lower mill."

"Let's see, don't all our boys there belong to church?" asked Mr. Wale.

"No," was the reply, "not more than two-thirds; but then, these determine the entire spirit of the mill and constitute the boys practically alike. They are the best set of fellows I ever dealt with in my life, and I have had experience with hundreds."

"Well," said Mr. Wale, "there is no use of our talking about investing in this town if Sarcott's notions mould its development. Strange that so sharp a business man fails to see his greatest mistake."

"I don't know as Sarcott's notions will mould the development of Rising Branch entirely," said McCracken. "They say the old church down here at Craggy Hill is to fight its way into town. Let us see, anyhow, whether it is successful before we do anything."

The two men drove on in silence some distance further, enjoying the clear, pure air, and feasting their eyes on the autumn beauty around them. They had arrived at a place where the road forked, one branch

leading up past the dam to Uncle Joe's, the other along the edge of the woods toward the church. The old house was just discernable among the trees.

"Oh, say!" exclaimed Mr. Wale, abruptly, "somebody in the village was telling me that they were going to decide that church question to-day. Suppose we drop into the old house. We are only out for a ride, and have time enough; besides, I used to go to church in my young days here, and I would like to see how it looks."

A broad smile settled on Elder Tribbey's face as he recognized the strangers. Bro. Gimler was just about to put the question, and he rapped on the desk to get the attention of the heads that were turning backward to find out the cause of the interruption.

"All who are in favor of building a house at the village, please rise to their feet."

About half a dozen, Father Leeb included, arose.

"All who are in favor of building on the old site, signify by the same sign."

The rest of the congregation arose.

"The old hypocrite!" whispered Mother Cranshaw to her nearest seat-mate, "he has been electioneering for this all summer."

Meeting was hardly out before Elder Tribbey sought the strangers; but they had gone.

"Not likely the old man will like it," remarked the Elder to Bro. Gimler on the road home.

"I feel a little sorry for him, too," answered Bro. Gimler, a little remorsefully; "it has been a favorite scheme of his so long, and I really think he believed it necessary."

"Nonsense, Anthony," replied the Elder; "old

Joe has a great bump of self-conceit. What he wanted was to be regarded as a sort of Solomon. Lessons like this do such men good."

Anthony Gimler made no reply, but rode on with an unquiet mind.

. . . . . .

"I must go to town to-day," said Elder Tribbey to his wife on the Wednesday after the church meeting; and to town he went. He was disappointed at finding Mr. Sarcott absent. He entered Mr. Dill's store to buy some groceries.

"Well, Elder," said Mr. Dill, as he tied up a package of sugar, "so the Hanaford men have gone back on you."

"What do you mean?" demanded the Elder.

"Why," answered Mr. Dill, retreating a little and watching the cloud that was darkening the Elder's face, "I thought you had heard. McCracken and Wale have thrown up their project of investing here."

The Elder choked back his astonishment, and in a tone of forced calmness asked:

"Why was that?"

"When they heard that you fellows down at Craggy Hill had decided not to build your church up here, they threw up the sponge. It seems they have a notion that a good church is a powerful factor in helping to manage sets of workmen."

Elder Tribbey's face was a study. He sought his carriage in silence, leaving a third of his purchases on Mr. Dill's counter.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. SARCOTT SURPRISED.

The grand opening of the dancing hall, that had been announced for some weeks, came off in due time. Jennie Sarcott, Will Timmons, and even Nannie, were in attendance.

"O papa!" cried Jennie the next morning, as she greeted her father in the dining-room, "was n't it delightful? I am so glad you have fitted up a stage, too. We can have operas now, after the railroad is finished. Oh, d-e-a-r," concluded she, with a yawn.

Mr. Sarcott's reply was not enthusiastic. "It was very successful, child," he said, a little coldly. He seemed anxious to turn the subject, and did so without ceremony by asking for Nannie.

"She is asleep yet," said Jennie; "she says she wants to get a good rest for Saturday night. So do I, too, and I am going to ask Mary to do the work."

"Jennie, do your share of the work, or stay at home in the future," replied her father sternly; but at that moment he turned his back and did not see the malicious grimace that the young lady made.

Mr. Sarcott sought his room. In the hall he met Mary, whom he admonished not to wake Nannie.

"I am afraid," said he, after he reached his room, "that the girls will get to liking this thing too well; I am not at home enough to curb them, and they don't like Mary. I must hurry up the widow. I think she could manage them, and I could get rid of Mary."

"You could have kept away temptation easier than you can bring in the widow to shield your children from it."

"I thought I met that girl in the hall," said Mr. Sarcott, going to the door and peering over the bannister. There was no one in sight.

"I wonder if I imagine that I hear these voices," said he; "they are not of the Joan of Arc kind, or I might think so," he added, as he returned to his chair. On the table before him lay a pile of letters, and he busied himself for some time reading them.

"I will have to patch up an explanation for Squire Tribbey when I meet him," said he, after he had finished the letters. "I really had no idea that McCracken and Wale would back out in this way, though. Well, I'm glad the church business is settled; that's what I was after, and what's good is good." Here he chuckled

"Now," he continued, "after this trial is called, I think I will arrange matters with the widow. Ha! ha!" He tied up the letters in a neat package, and, putting them in his pocket, went to the stable.

"David," said he to the hostler, "you may hitch up the black mare and drive me to Hanaford this afternoon. I shall want to be there to-morrow anyhow, and I have other business that I can do to-day."

"Won't I hev ter be ther myself ter-morrer, sir?" asked David.

"Has the sheriff summoned you?"

"Yes, sir; he war here yisterday when you war gone, and I 'spect he sarved a lot of papers in town."

"Well," said Mr. Sarcott, "as the defendant has jumped his bail, there can be no trial. I want to be there, but you will not be needed."

"Mr. Sarcott," said David, with some hesitation, and at the same time looking to see that they were alone, "I hev a matter on my mind, and it keeps a comin' up ter bother me. I promised not ter tell, but I hev a sense of duty, sir; it are hefty inside o' me, as 't were, an' I must speak. Seein', too, as you 're my master, 't ain't nowise right as thet I should keep this still."

"Speak out, David; what now?" said Mr. Sarcott.

"Mr. Sarcott," resumed David, slowly, "do yer think this trial are n't comin' off? If yer think that way, yer fooled. Look here, sir: Jake Conway are back."

"Back?" gasped the astonished Mr. Sarcott.

"He—are—back!" said David, dwelling on each word with solemn emphasis.

"How do you know?"

"Bob Loomis let it out ter me last night arter the dance."

"Put up the harness for the present, David," said the great man; "I believe I will not go at once."

He was, to all outward appearance, perfectly calm, and David watched him as he took his way hurriedly toward the store.

When he was gone, David began a grotesque performance. "Now you hoof-shaver," said he, dancing on the barn floor and shaking his fist in the direction of Bob's shop, "you old sledge-swinger, you tarnal sally-mander, you've bin a wantin' this place of old Dave's fur more years than one. You've bin thick with the old man, an' only waitin' ter see this chicken bounced; but now I hev got yer. Felt mighty big goin' up in his liberry an' consultin' an' wire-pullin' yer way in; but I give yer story away, fool yer war ter tell me."

David indulged in these extravagances for a full hour, stopping at frequent intervals to congratulate himself that the danger of Bob's usurping his position was forever past.

. . . . . .

"Come here, Dill," said Mr. Sarcott, as he entered the store. Mr. Dill was reading a newspaper; folding it, he complied at once.

"Have you heard that Jake Conway has come back?"

"Jake Conway back!" exclaimed Mr. Dill.

"Yes, Dill, I have reason to believe that he is, and that he will appear when his trial is called to-morrow. Now, this will break my plans up, you know."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Dill, with a half-frightened look, "ah, yes, sir; and—and—"

"Don't get nervous now; you are next thing to a baby. I like to see some nerve now and then. I want that boy convicted; that's the only thing I can do now. After I get things fixed he can be pardoned out of jail, but I want to be rid of him for a while. You know why. I fear that blacksmith has played me false. I'll

make it hot for him, and for you, too, if you don't walk chalk. You understand?"

"Oh, yes, sir," answered Mr. Dill, in great trepidation.

"I want you to go to Hanaford to-morrow; you are summoned on this case anyhow. I want you to swear that the boy got a can of oil from you the night of the fire."

Mr. Dill was pale as a ghost.

"Oh, don't get pale. I want you to swear, too, that Jake remarked to you on one occasion that if Mike Follin were out of the way there would be a chance for the rest of the boys. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," squeaked Mr. Dill, shaking like a leaf.

"Now keep quiet, and I will see one or two of the Italians."

He left the store, and hurried toward the railroad.

"I would like to know what under the sun is the explanation of the matter; but I must avoid the widow for the present. Plague it, I am driven to this step. Some of her friends have been acting the fool, and have the boy back. I am afraid they have corrupted Bob, too."

"Corrupted! Ha! ha! ha!"

Mr. Sarcott halted. "Pshaw!" said he, looking up and listening, "I believe my ear-drums are abnormally sensitive."

He waited a moment before proceeding. There was no sound but the cawing of a crow on the rail fence near by.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRIAL.

The Grand Jury had indicted Jake for arson simply. To answer to this charge, he had been awaiting the action of the Court of Common Pleas. No doubt the reader is anxious to know where he had been waiting, and how Bob Loomis managed to have him on hand to Mr. Sarcott's disgust. In order to pick up several stitches we have dropped, especially in the history of Bob, we will go back for some distance in this story. About three days before the mad exploit of Mollie Stormer, Bob was alone at home, "Laury" having gone out. He had come from the shop, and was not a little provoked at finding such slim indications of supper. A hot fire was burning in the stove, however, and a note, scrawled rudely with red ink, informed him that Laury had been hastily called to assist Mrs. Dill, who was sick. The note informed him further that he might expect to be alone the greater part of the night, and ended by describing the exact whereabouts of such victuals as would, if properly cooked, satisfy his hunger.

"That are a pritty idea," said Bob, throwing the note back upon the table. "I'm in fine trim fur

cookin', tired as a horse and blacker 'n a ton o' charcoal. Well" (he lowered his voice, and there was a depth of real feeling in his tones) "I know she would n't hev gone this time o' the evenin' if suthin' more 'n ordinary warn't ter pay. I might as well knuckle down an' make the best out of it."

Bob's culinary gymnastics would not have edified Laury. It is sufficient here to say that his supper was very frugal. He looked at his burnt potatoes with a rueful countenance, and to make amends for the weak coffee, he soon lit his pipe, leaving a conglomeration of dishes and cooking utensils for Laury to clean up. He smoked for a while in deep silence, then, knocking the ashes from his pipe, he took the lamp and carried it to a small desk in an adjoining room. He walked stealthily, and when he had set the lamp down, he paused and listened as if he feared he might not be alone. The cold winter wind blew around the corners of his little cottage, and entering at some unnoticed crack, caused the lamp to smoke until through its blackened chimney only light enough struggled to render the room ghostly. Holding the lamp in his hand, Bob raised the lid of the desk and drew forth a paper.

"All safe, are ye?" he muttered. "Good enough! I 'll have use fur ye one o' these days. If I never used ye agin, yer hev done me benerfit enough a-showin' me the rascalerty of Jim Sarcott. Anvils an' pokers! I wish I could show as good a evidence that my mortgige was paid. However this paper come ter be lyin' around loose are a mystery ter me, but I 'm glad of it—yes, sir-ee." He perused the paper for fully half an hour with unabated interest, and when he put it back carefully he drew a long breath and said:

"One o' these days I 'll let this out ter Laury, but not yit. It are good she hain't happened to find it out."

For a long time after replacing the paper, Bob stood leaning on the desk. The light of the smoky lamp fell upon his face, now brightening it up, now letting it fall into shadow, according as the wind creeping into the room played fitfully with the flame. These changes were but the outward signs of a commotion within. As the internal forces of the earth often manifest themselves in wave-like motion along its surface, so the light and shadow that moved in waves over Bob's face might have had their origin in the forces that were playing within.

"I will be free from his clutches," was his sudden ejaculation as he picked up the lamp. "There are more good ter be had out o' his say so than in it."

From this time on Bob was a changed man. His attitude, as we have seen, was so changed toward the Conways that it provoked their surprise. Time and again during the summer, when Bob was alone in his cottage, and especially after some interview with Mr. Sarcott, he would steal to the desk and spend a long time perusing the paper. It seemed to strengthen his resolution.

By flattering Mr. Dill, Bob had learned from time to time the true financial standing of various parties in Rising Branch. The hollowness of all its apparent prosperity was a matter of note with him. From the same source he also learned that the Conway family had contracted a large bill at the store. He had been, too, a close observer of Mr. Sarcott's attentions to the widow, and when that gentleman had broached the

matter of Jake's flight to him, he was not slow to read his whole scheme. Now partly to gain favor with the people of Craggy Hill, several of whom, including Uncle Joe, had made it a point to be kind to him, and partly for the satisfaction that an inferior man has in triumphing over a superior one, Bob had concocted his counter scheme.

Eighteen miles from Carterville Bob had a brother, a well-to-do farmer. To him the smith had paid a flying visit in the spring, and had arranged for Jake to work for him during the summer.

"Mind yer, Bill," said he, after he had explained the situation, "keep the lad as shady as yer kin. Ther's no one here thet knows him, and don't yer furgit thet his name are Sam Pounds."

The brother assented to all this, and into the family of Tobe Loomis the new hand, Sam Pounds, was duly installed. Communication was kept up with his family through Bob. Mr. Sarcott had been told where Jake was, but, relying on Bob's fidelity, he had no expectation of his return until such time as he should dictate.

. . . . . .

Immediately after making the outrageous arrangements narrated in the preceding chapter, Mr. Sarcott sought for Bob, but that worthy was well out of his way.

"There is nothing for it but the trial," said the magnate, choking down his wrath; "but we 'll see who comes out ahead. I have never been crossed, and" (here he uttered an oath) "I never will."

. . . . . .

Hanaford was full of people. It was the county seat and court was in session. The day of Jake's trial came on, and Rising Branch was fully represented.

Uncle Joe, pale from his recent sickness, entered the court-room, and was scowled at savagely by Mr. Sarcott. The Italians were present, the dark form of Adolfo among them.

With his usual smoothness of face, Mr. Sarcott had gone to Mrs. Conway after her arrival in Hanaford: "It is a little unfortunate, Amelia, that the boy has returned, but now that he is here, I will attend to securing additional counsel."

"That is provided for, James, thank you," replied the widow.

"By whom?"

"Uncle Joe."

And Mr. Sarcott became more hostile to Uncle Joe than ever before.

"O yes! O yes!" cried the sheriff, "I now declare the Court of Common Pleas for the county of N——— to be duly convened."

The case of the State of F———, against Jacob Conway was called, and the defendant appeared.

He came into court accompanied by his mother and Eurilda, and took a seat by his counsel.

"He are as guilty as a dog," remarked David, who was eyeing him from a seat in the farthest corner.

"Of course he is," replied the party addressed; "you can see that by his face. 'Tell you what, I can read a pris'ner at sight. I have been to twenty trials in this old court house, and I never failed to spot my man yet. You remember that case of old Hen———."

"Silence in this court-room," roared the sheriff, and the buzzing came suddenly to an end.

The forenoon was spent in securing a jury, and the day had well advanced before the trial properly began.

"Not guilty!"

The prisoner returned his answer in a clear, manly voice. The clerk took his seat.

"He 'll sing another song in three days," whispered David to his neighbor.

"Silence in this court-room," roared the sheriff again, and David subsided.

"Persons present outside the bar," remarked the judge, "must either be quiet or retire."

The State opened its case, and examined three witnesses before adjournment. They were Jeff Stormer and two of the Italians.

David was the first witness on the following morning, and testified to the facts already known to the reader.

Mr. Dill testified as he had been directed to by Mr. Sarcott. He trembled exceedingly when put upon the stand, and in his cross-examination became thoroughly mixed up.

"The fool!" thought Mr. Sarcott, "his want of sand makes his testimony not worth the cost of a summons."

With the positive testimony of these few witnesses the prosecution rested the case. Few people in the court-room felt that the prisoner was innocent.

"He 'll get ten years," said one.

"Hardly," said another. "He 's so young the judge will put it on light."

The defense occupied much of the time examining witnesses to prove the defendant's good character. Mr. Sarcott, who had managed to get himself summoned for this very purpose, testified to the point.

"Can 't clear the chap on that character business,"

remarked the philosophic man before alluded to; "you can get any amount of men to swear to a man's character; the testimony of them Italians and the hostler will do it up for the boy. He 's good for the *pen*, as sure 's you 're born."

"We have but three more witnesses," was the announcement of the defense, as the afternoon session of the third day opened.

"Miss Jennie Sarcott."

Mr. Sarcott, who had been sitting inside the bar close to the window, started to his feet. Did his eyes deceive him? No, there was his daughter on the stand, and his astonishment prevented his uttering a sound before her examination began.

"Your age, Miss Sarcott?"

"Seventeen years old."

"Were you at home on the night of the —th of last February?"

Jennie grew red as she glanced at her father, and cast her eyes to the floor.

"No, sir."

"State were you were."

The girl hesitated, and with eyes still fixed on the floor, replied:

"I was at a ball in Hanaford."

"How did you go there?"

"In a sleigh."

"Did you return in a sleigh?"

"I did."

"Now, Miss Sarcott, state what occurred on your way home?"

Jennie gave an account of the collision.

"Do you know with whom your sleigh collided?"

"I do."

"Now, what time did you reach Rising Branch?"

"About four o'clock."

"Who was with you?"

"I object!" said the prosecution.

The Judge sustained the objection, and the defense resumed.

"Now, Miss Sarcott, tell this court plainly what you saw in the village as you passed the boarding-house?"

There was some noise in the court-room. It was caused by the Italians, who were eagerly straining forward to catch the words of the witness. Adolfo, especially, was a study for a picture.

"Silence!" shouted the sheriff. Instantly an oppressive silence pervaded the room.

"I saw two men pass to the back of the boarding-house, carrying a small oil-can."

"Did you know the men?"

"I did; it was bright moonlight."

"Are they in this court-room?"

"They are."

Here the Italians were commanded to stand up, and Jennie pointed out Adolfo and another one.

Adolfo was dazed; but in an instant a black look crossed his face, and he turned toward the door.

"Are these witnesses in charge of the sheriff?" asked the defense.

"The sheriff will see that they are," said the judge.

A hum pervaded the room as the sheriff ordered the Italians inside the bar.

Jennie cast a terrified look at them as she left the

stand. It was returned by Adolfo. His black eyes pierced her like an arrow.

"The next witness."

"Miss Mary Somers!"

If Mr. Sarcott was astonished before, no words can picture his amazement now. Only the dignity of his surroundings prevented his expressing his feelings. When had the defense summoned this witness, and why?

"Your age, Miss Somers?"

"Thirty-six," answered Mary, while her keen black eyes shot forth their glances into every part of the room. A sort of triumphant smile stole over her face, and her lips twitched as she singled out Mr. Sarcott and riveted her gaze on him. Adolfo watched her eagerly.

"Do you keep house for Mr. Sarcott, of Rising Branch?"

"I do."

"What was your occupation before you went to live at his home?"

"I was a governess."

"Have you ever traveled abroad?"

"I have."

"Please state to this Court where you have traveled?"

"On the Continent of Europe, especially in Italy."

"How long were you in Italy?"

"Seven years. I attended school there."

"Do you speak Italian?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Miss Somers" (here the counsel for defense arose and leaned forward, while perfect silence reigned

in the house) "were you in Mr. Dill's store early in the night of the ——th of February, after the fire?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were any of these men" (pointing to the Italians) "in there?"

"They were in the bar-room of the store, and I saw them; they were all there but one."

"Which one?"

Mary pointed out Henri, the one whom Mike had hurt.

"Did you hear them talk?"

"I did, plainly."

"Did you understand them?"

"Very easily."

"State, Miss Somers, which one you heard speak the most distinctly."

"That tall one, Adolfo they call him, I believe."

"What did he say?"

The ticking of the court-room clock was painfully loud. Adolfo's fingers twitched nervously. His companions cast glances, now at him, now at the witness. They were aware, evidently, that something unusual was going on, but did not fully comprehend it.

"He said," answered Mary, speaking slowly, "'We are all right, boys; the old man's hostler saw Jake out, too, and we can easily get it on him. I will tell the old man that Carlo and Pietro saw Jake set the fire, and Dave will help us out.'"

"You heard this language distinctly?"

"I did," replied Mary, emphatically.

"May it please the Court," said Jake's counsel, "we have an Italian interpreter present, and are pre-

pared to verify this statement of this witness as to her ability to speak the Italian tongue."

A tall man with a dark moustache came upon the stand, and began a conversation with Mary.

He turned to the Judge in a few moments and said:

"Sir Judge, she speak the Italian very excellent. Much better as I speak the English."

"Silence!" demanded the sheriff, as Mary retired, and an unusual disturbance began near where David sat.

"Curse her!" said Mr. Sarcott, mentally, "she has been a demon ever since she came to me. I knew she spoke several languages, but who would have dreamed this?"

The last witness was Uncle Joe Sales. He came upon the stand with a feeble tread, and bore Mr. Sarcott's scowl without a change on his face.

"Mr. Sales," asked the defense, "were you away from home at any time on the morning of the —th of last February?"

"I war."

"Where were you?"

"Drivin' on the road from my house ter Dr. Peters'."

"State what happened on the road?"

Uncle Joe gave an account of the collision.

"About what time was this?"

"'Bout three o'clock in the mornin', as near as I could jedge."

"Now Mr. Sales, after the collision did you pick up any thing in the snow?"

"I picked up a pockit-book, and a paper thet had fell out of it."

"Are these the ones?" (holding up a crumpled paper and a large red pocket-book.)

"Thet looks like the pockit-book, and I kin tell the paper if I kin read it."

The lawyer handed him the paper.

"That is it," said the old man, as he adjusted his glasses.

"May it please the Court," said the lawyer, "the reading of this paper is highly essential to this defense."

"Proceed," said the Judge.

The lawyer smoothed out the paper, and read as follows:

"DEAR DAVE:—*The scalawags will do it. They want to get even on Mike anyhow. Hope he will get out, though. I saw 'Dolf the other day, and they are all in for it. I know the boss keeps Jeff supplied with a good lot of tin. You can get it while the muss is going on, and I'll be on hand in the morning. I am going to trot Jen to a dance that night, and will bring her back. Tell the scamps not to light up till after they see us come home.*

"*W.*"

The sensation that this note occasioned was equaled only by the remainder of Uncle Joe's testimony.

"Mr. Sales, did the pocket-book you found have any marks upon it, whereby its owner might be identified?"

"His name are stamped on the inside kiver," replied the old man.

The lawyer opened the book, and holding it up to the jury, showed them the name of *Will Timmons.*

The interest in the remainder of the trial centered mainly in the argument for the defense, and especially in the concluding sentence:

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, I will be glad

enough to show up this conspiracy when those guilty foreigners are tried."

The jury returned a verdict of "not guilty" without leaving their seats, and in the fullness of her joy, Eurilda embraced Jake again and again. Mrs. Conway wept for gladness. As they passed out, led by Bob Loomis, a noise in the Grand Jury room attracted their attention. A young lady had swooned, and been carried thither. It was Jennie Sarcott.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNCLE JOE'S SACRIFICE.

It would be hard to tell whether Uncle Joe was more elated at the result of Jake's trial than disappointed at the action of Craggy Hill church. He had not heard of the just punishment of Elder Tribbey's meanness. That worthy remained out of the old man's company, a thing that the exciting events narrated in the last chapter enabled him to do very easily. Intense anger at Mr. Sarcott and chagrin at the outcome of his own scheming had well nigh made him ill. He was in a troublesome dilemma. He wished earnestly to take revenge on the man who had deceived him, by throwing his influence in favor of building at the village, but if he did this he feared that his own selfishness would be too fully revealed. His desire to prevent this overcame his longing for revenge, and he resolved to abide in the course he had taken. A sick child in the home of Mr. Sarcott was not the only new trouble that followed that gentleman after the trial. As might have been expected, David the hostler was suddenly missing. The alacrity with which he disappeared from Rising

Branch was equaled only by a similar movement on the part of young Timmons. An investigation showed the extent of the conspiracy that led to the burning of the boarding-house. The young man's intimacy with the Italians had grown out of a number of meetings at David's room in Mr. Sarcott's barn, where night after night they had all met to indulge in cards. In an evil hour, lack of funds, and a brain fired with drink, had prompted young Timmons to broach the scheme to David. Its result the reader knows.

Mary had gone back to Mr. Sarcott's fully expecting that his wrath would be speedily visited upon her. Her surprise was very great when, after giving a few directions relative to Jennie, he said in a quiet way:

"Well Mary, I am glad you did Jake a good turn. I was really afraid the boy would be convicted in spite of his innocence. It's a good thing to be educated, Mary. Ha, ha! it did me good to see the astonishment of those Italians."

Knowing the duplicity of her employer, and that his present outward demeanor was purposely assumed, Mary was about to return a cutting reply, but Mr. Sarcott, anticipating it, no doubt, turned immediately and left the room.

Mary stood watching the closed door a moment, then muttered: "Go, you serpent, but don't deceive yourself into thinking that I can not read you. You are beaten at this point, but I know you too well not to know that even now you are planning to turn your defeat to victory. And you will be thwarted again. I know it—yes, I know it!"

Nothing unusual marked the long and severe winter that now followed, unless indeed that the reputation of

Rising Branch for godlessness became more pronounced. Three saloons did a flourishing business. The dancing hall was crowded two nights every week, and while the nights were longest these gatherings were supplemented by travelling theatrical and opera troupes. Jennie Sarcott slowly recovered from a severe illness, but it was remarked that she was seldom seen away from her father's house.

The work on the railroad progressed slowly, but with the opening of spring it was renewed with great vigor.

The canopy of winter's brightest days is cold and cheerless; of its darkest, leaden and funereal. It is a relief to glide from under these into the genial airs of spring. Yet I would not be without the winter. In its very desolation lie the possibilities of returning gladness, and the soul needs for a season its chilliness in order to respond to the touch of a warmer breath.

Never had Uncle Joe hailed the advent of spring with greater delight. He had been so confined at home during the winter by rheumatism, that even the Conway cottage sadly missed his presence.

"I reckin, Samantha, the warm weather are come to stay," said the old man as he hobbled out upon the wide porch about the middle of May. "I declare," he added, as his eyes ranged over a succession of plowed fields, "if corn plantin' are n't here agin."

Aunt Samantha placed his chair where he could see the movements of his hired man, who, in a field close by, was engaged with two lads planting corn. Overhead wheeled a robber crow, waiting a chance to drop to the ground and scratch up the precious kernels. Christ's parable of the sower and the seed occurred to

Uncle Joe, and he watched with renewed interest the gyrations of the bird.

"That ar crow," said the old man to his wife, "are not goin' partikerlarly fur the seed by the wayside; he are tryin' ter dig it out o' the good soil."

"Ain't thet what the devil are always tryin' ter do?" answered Aunt Samantha. "Yer would hev realized it more, Joseph, if yer hed been able ter git about this winter."

"Why?" queried Uncle Joe.

"I would hev told ye before, Joseph, if yer had not been so poorly. Who hez labored harder than ye ter plant the good seed in the hearts of yer Bible class at Craggy Hill? And yet it pains me ter tell ye thet the paint an' tinsel of the village has lured four or five of 'em away."

The old man looked the astonishment that Aunt Samantha did not give him time to utter.

"Yes, Joseph," continued she, "the saloons up ther' an' thet dancin' hall have enticed Jimmy Tone, Susie Bonham, and Bessie Coleman out of the true path. The gals hez gone jest crazy over dancin', an' Jimmie, they say, hez been seen drinkin' more then once."

Uncle Joe could only groan.

"I know I hev wrenched yer heart, Joseph, and furgive me fur the pain, but the time hez come fur ye ter know it."

"O Samantha," groaned the old man, "say that it are any ones but them. If ever I war sure on anything, it war that those children was safe. Hev n't they hed pious parents? Hev n't I give them the best days I hed?"

He was going on in this strain when Aunt Samantha

interrupted him. "It are just ez I say," she continued, "the devil works hard at the seed in good soil. Harder p'r'aps because he only has ter pick light at thet by the wayside If it war Seth Mingo or Jinsie Cummins I would n't have wondered. They war never half convertid, anyhow."

The old man shook his head mournfully. The brightness of spring seemed suddenly to have lost all attraction for him.

"I must go ter the village, Samantha, jest as soon as I 'm able ter ride," he remarked, presently.

"I am hopin' that may be soon, Joseph," was the reply, "but I 'm afeard such news won't further ye far on the path of healin'."

"Such news," rejoined Uncle Joe, "demands me ter be gittin' about."

Indeed Aunt Samantha's revelation seemed to put some strength into the old man's limbs, for he arose with an agility that surprised her, and went into the house, his face wearing a look of determination.

A few days more of warm, sunshiny weather brought Uncle Joe out of the house.

His first visit was to the village. Thither he rode, mounted, as we first saw him, on the old horse, and jogging along apparently lost in thought. All about him was a sea of green, overarched with a blue so soft, so peaceful, that the old man's troubled spirit grew quiet as he went. He passed the old meeting-house at Craggy Hill; the woods around it were full of the song of birds; once more the graves were carpeted, and at the base of the headstones lingered a few violets. The creeping myrtle had half hidden the low footstones, and out of its tangle sprang the sweet-william and the pink.

Uncle Joe paused a moment, and raised his eyes. "Yes," said he to himself, "I love the dead, and I might agree ter this and worship fer these last few days of my life here in this spot; but who is it that is callin' us? Certainly not the silent tongues thet are restin' here, but the livin'—yes, the livin'; them as are in the thickest of the fight, and in the power of the tempter."

The old man soon rode on, and in due time reached Rising Branch. It is not our purpose to follow him into the Conway cottage, and in his walk around the village. What took place there the reader can learn from what follows.

"It are unusual late fur Joseph," said Aunt Samantha, as she watched the last ray of the sun fade from the tree tops. Her uneasiness increased as the twilight faded into dusk. A few stars had become visible before a well known "whoa!" in the direction of the barn announced the delinquent's arrival. It was evident to Aunt Samantha that Uncle Joe was a little excited, for he laid his hat on the tea table, and drawing off his shoe he put a slipper on one foot only.

"I are not hungry, Samantha," said he, as his wife pressed him to a seat. "Hurry and git the tea things off, fur I have somethin' ter tell ye."

The good old woman soon had the table cleared, while all the time she was wondering what new thing had now taken the attention of her aged spouse.

"What do ye think, Samantha?" said he, abruptly, before she was quite through. "There were preachin' in Risin' Branch ter-day."

"Preachin'!"

"Yes, preachin', and a sarmon that is Scripter if ever there war any Scripter."

"Why, Joseph, I do n't know what yer mean. Preachin' in Risin' Branch? Preachin' on a Tuesday? Who hez bin preachin', and where, fer pity sake?"

"I do n 't wonder yer astonished, Samantha, but I hev been ter preachin' this day, and thet in Risin' Branch village. Now be quiet while I tell ye. When I come intcr the vil age I seed a big crowd standin' not fur from Dill's store. I hunched my way in, and sure's yer live ther was a stranger standin' onter a store box and preachin'. He war a middle-aged man, dressed middlin' well in a black suit. I hed a long talk with him arter the sarmon, and found that his name war James Tarford, and he war what he called a evangelist. Some of the crowd said he belonged ter the Camerlites, but he did n 't own no sich name, and said he believed in the one church on airth, and that was the Church of Christ. What hez been movin' me is thet he preached jist what you and me hez been thinkin' this many a year was the teachin' of the Bible. He explained how a sinner could come ter Christ, and O, Samantha, if yer could hev heard him! It 's jest as plain, and jest as you and me hev thought ourselves from readin' the Scripter'. I certainly hev seen the thing this way for many a long year, but as I hed so little eddication I thought sometimes I might be wrong, and so hev sot patient listenin' ter Elder Gaines. The more he hez preached the more I hev bin muddled up, but this man hez made it all plain ter me. He showed how Christ sot talkin' with his Apostles jest before his death; how he promised them the Holy Sperrit; how he died, was raised, and ascended, and then how the Sperrit come down onter them Apostles on the day of Pentercost, and how Peter, speakin' under its influence, preached ter

the multitude at Jerusalem. He showed jest what Peter told them ter do in order ter be brought inter the kingdom, and then wound up by showin' how we must go back ter these Apostles and ter no one else in order ter find the way there ourselves. In his talk with me he explained more than I could tell yer before midnight, and what is astonishin' ter me is thet it 's jest what I hev thought the Scripter did teach. Especially, Samantha, he showed me one thing thet has been botherin' me, and cleared it all up. I hev wondered, so hev you, why we hev been prayin' nearly every winter here at the meeting house fur the Sperrit ter come down and convert us. Some hev said they felt it come, and war so happy, but I confess I never did. Jest listen a minnit." Here Uncle Joe proceeded slowly, and emphasized all his points. "Christ promised ter send the Sperrit ter his Apostles; now Samantha jest you read the sixteenth varse of the fourteenth of John, and the seventh varse of the sixteenth chapter."

Aunt Samantha read them.

"Now Christ went away, as ye kin see by readin' the last chapters of the first three gospels. Now when was that promise fulfilled, Samantha? Jest read the second of Acts."

Aunt Samantha read the entire chapter, Uncle Joe listening attentively.

"Now it 's plain," he continued, "thet Peter was speakin' by the power of the Sperrit." Aunt Samantha nodded. "And he would n 't tell a lie?" added the old man. The old lady shook her head.

"Now," resumed Uncle Joe, "the chapter tells us that Peter was a preachin' ter a mixed crowd, and was preachin' about Christ. Them people heard him."

"Sartainly," answered his wife, "fur they axed what they had ter do. Here it are in the thirty-seventh verse, 'Men and brethring, what shell we do?'"

"Eggsactly," said Uncle Joe, "and what did Peter tell them? Jest read the thirty-eighth varse." The old lady read it.

"That 's it, now," went on Uncle Joe; "they heard, they believed, and Peter told them what ter do. Now it seems ter me, when I know what the inspired word tells me ter do, and know if I do that or not, thet I I have evidence enough that God will keep his promises. But, Samantha, ther 's more than this I want ter tell ye, and it 's a thing that 's commin' so suddin upon ye that maybe ye orter sleep before ye are prepared ter hear it."

No doubt Uncle Joe was sincere, but he could have taken no better way to prevent his wife from following out his suggestion than to make this last remark.

"Speak it out, Joseph," said the old lady, with a calmness that surprised her husband.

"This man is tryin' ter organize a church in the village. Why should we not leave the brethring here, seein' they are determined ter do nothin' fur the salvation of Risin' Branch, and give our aid ter this movement?"

Aunt Samantha raised both her hands, and her face took on a look of horror.

"What! Joseph Sales, make a skism in the church? Split the church into two fackshuns? Are ye gone wild, Joseph? Hez yer sickniss affected ye, or what?"

"I am as sane as I ever war," answered Uncle Joe. "Now, Samantha, jest git calm and listen. Ye know the late action regardin' the new meetin'-house. Ye

know, too, sorry as I am ter say it, thet personal considerations hez hed much ter do with thet decision. Now, when a people refuse ter pitch ther tent where they can serve God best, and when, added ter thet, they don't teach the Scripter as it orter be taught, aren't we in duty bound ter leave them ter themselves?"

"Who would yer have in yer new church, Joseph?"

"Very few, I know, ter begin with. The widder Conway's family, us, and, I think, from what Wes Kibler told me, some might be expectid from there. He war at the village and heard Elder Tarford."

"And how would ye git yer house?" asked Aunt Samantha.

"Ah!" answer Uncle Joe, "now ye hev reached a question. If ye thought I war crazy a minnit ago, what will ye think now?"

Aunt Samantha eyed him curiously.

"Samantha," said the old man solemnly, as he arose and stood before her chair. "Very few in this big world hev seen fit ter sacrifice fur its good. And yit I read somewhere in a book thet the progress of humanity hez forever laid along the path of sacrifice. A few noble sperrits hev been willin' ter give up some of the blessin's of this world so thet the world might hev more. Samantha, we are gettin' old. We will not need much in our old age, and, as we draw nearer ter heavin, mebbe it won't be so hard fur us ter lay down some of the airth."

"What! Joseph, yer don't mean—?"

"Yes, Samantha, we kin sell our old home; a little house in the village will do us. With part of the money I kin well nigh build a little meetin'-house, and with

what are left we will try ter git along till we are called ter a home above."

The shadow of pain on the face of the aged wife seemed for a moment to deepen. Her knees trembled, and she tried to speak. There was a long, deep silence, in the midst of which the ancient clock slowly struck the hour of ten. The echo of each stroke lingered in the room like a prolonged sigh. Then the shadow lifted—the storm had passed, and, as Uncle Joe looked in her face, he knew that she had caught a measure of his own inspiration.

"Joseph," said she, firmly, "I hev never been behind ye in a good work, and I don't want ter be now. If I am convinced that it are my duty, I am ready ter make the sacrifice; and one thought is sufficient for me—Christ died for us."

The old man did not lift his eyes; his lips were murmuring a prayer. Aunt Samantha drew him gently to the side of the chair, and they both knelt. It was a beautiful sight to see this aged couple beseeching God to help them lay this unusual offering upon His altar.

They arose calmly, and Aunt Samantha asked:

"But, Joseph, wher kin yer git a spot ter put a house on?"

"It might seem ter ye a hard thing ter git such a spot in the village, Samantha; and so it would, exceptin' it were fur the widder Conway. Thet small lot jest beyond her house is all thet she owns free of mortgige; but thet is free, and she is glad ter sell it, especially fur such a purpose. I hev seed her."

The lengthening of the summer days did not weaken Uncle Joe's resolution, and a visit from Elder Tarford only made him more anxious to carry it out. Still the

old couple suffered some keen pangs, especially when a man from Cartersville offered to buy the old home. The farm had come to Uncle Joe from his father. He himself had been born upon it, and as he realized that he was really going to part with a spot that had hallowed his childhood, he both wept and prayed.

In the meantime the news of his strange resolution went abroad. It stirred the congregation at Craggy Hill in a powerful manner.

"Humph," said Elder Tribbey, "have n't I always said that the old fool wanted to glorify himself?—but this is a freak that I never expected."

Mr. Sarcott heard the news with a sardonic grin. "I will soon trip that up," was his remark.

"I would indeed. You have made such a success of tripping lately."

Mr. Sarcott was alone in his library. "Pooh," said he, "I am getting used to that fool Mary. I do n't mind her chatter any more."

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE CONWAY COTTAGE AGAIN.

Again we must go back with the reader to bring forward the history of the Conway family parallel with that of Uncle Joe. The result of Jake's trial was anything but satisfactory to Mr. Sarcott. He was very angry at Bob Loomis, and very much troubled at Jennie's escapade with young Timmons. No one, however, would have suspected that he was otherwise than highly pleased at Jake's acquittal. He entered the store a few nights thereafter, where the usual mixture of idlers had assembled. The principal theme was the result of the trial.

"Now, boys," said he, after listening a moment to the various opinions expressed, "it's just as I always knew it would be, and I want to hear no more of your nonsense. The boy was perfectly innocent, and the Italians have proved themselves to be the scamps their national reputation gives them. It might have gone hard with the boy, though, if I had n't helped him out."

There was hardly one present who did not know

the utter falsity of this last statement, yet not one ventured to gainsay it. Mr. Sarcott was king of Rising Branch. The utter obsequiousness to which he had reduced his subjects manifested itself in the instant change of opinion that followed his remark.

"I allers thought the boy war innocent," said Bose Compton, "and when I heered the opinyun of the boss here, thet settled me. Jest as good as if the joory hed sed it, says I."

"I knew," said another, "if the boss helped the boy he war as good as free."

"When the boss throws out his opinyun," added a third, "it are as good as wheat. He said this was the place fur the railroad, and here it are."

Mr. Sarcott affected not to pay any attention to this miserable servility. He walked toward the back of the room and appeared to be in conversation with Mr. Dill. When he had left the store entirely, old Bose blew a cloud of smoke from his pipe and remarked in an undertone: "Wonder if the old man would n't like the boy fur a step-son? he, he, he!" A general laugh followed, in the midst of which the form of Bob Loomis appeared standing near the counter and encircled in a wreath of smoke. Where he came from nobody knew, for no one had seen him enter.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Bose in surprise, "Where did you come from?"

"No matter where frum," answered Bob, "only so I heered that last remark."

"Well, what of it?" asked Bose.

"Jake Conway will never be step-son to no one, least of all to Jim Sarcott."

"Humph, everybody knows that the old man has an

eye on the widder. What do you know about it, anyhow?"

"Mebbe I don't know nothin'," replied Bob, "and mebbe I do."

Bose questioned him no further, and Bob smoked on in silence till the company began to break up.

These gatherings at the store, at Jeff Stormer's saloon, and at the tavern, became more common as winter approached. With stormy days and long nights, facilities for loafing were greatly increased. Mr. Sarcott was not often seen abroad. Stormy weather often prevented work on the railway, and Jennie's sickness had been to him a great source of anxiety. It was observed, however, that no night passed that a bright light did not burn late and long in the window of Mr. Sarcott's library.

The cheerless aspect of winter wrought strangely on the mind of Jake Conway. To Eurilda and her mother the darkest days were brightened by the thought of his innocence of a serious charge. Glad of the good fortune of his acquittal, they saw nothing but the sun behind the clouds. But with Jake it was different. Glad indeed he was to be cleared of the charge against him, but a sense of humiliation to think he had been led by his own carelessness into the difficulty oppressed him. He found himself more than ever adverse to following his former plan of becoming a preacher. Visions of earthly prosperity still haunted him. He saw clearly through the duplicity of Mr. Sarcott, but the seed of discontent had been sown, and the boy was unhappy. He knew, too, that the mortgage hanging over his mother's home was due in the spring, that much of her money, notwithstanding outside help, had

been spent for him; and these things strengthened the resolution that he made one night as he crept up to his garrett bed: "I must get into something that will make me money. Mother and Eurilda will surely give up this preaching notion when they think how bad off our money affairs are."

This thought Jake expressed next morning at the breakfast table. Mrs. Conway looked troubled, and Eurilda's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, what is the use of clinging to this idea forever?" said Jake, pettishly. "I must get at something that there's money in. Even if I should want to preach, I would be hampered now, for some people will always think I made that fire. It seems to me, mother, if there's anything in this question of God's providence it must be that he has allowed these things to happen so as to turn me away from preaching."

Mrs. Conway made no reply to this argument. She knew too well that the source of the boy's discontent, and especially his aversion to becoming a preacher, was in the associations to which her want of faith had recently exposed him. Eurilda, however, spoke:

"But listen, Jake, to my plan. Let us not say anything about the preaching for a while. Let us see if my plan for getting out of the mortgage trouble will not work. Mrs. Cool, at Hanaford, has advertised for a girl. She is a good Christian woman, and I have made up my mind to take the place. She will pay me three dollars a week. Here is a letter, too, from Mr. Wale, who says he will pay fifteen dollars a month to a few hands in his woolen mill, and he offers you a place. Now, I will go to Mr. Sarcott and tell him that we can pay part of the mortgage in the spring, and ask him to

renew the balance for awhile. I believe he will. Now, what do you think of that?"

"What! you work out?" said Jake. "Why, Eurilda Conway, you were never gone from home a week in your life."

"I know it," answered the brave girl; "but I can go. Mrs. Cool is a good woman, and mother can trust me there."

"But what will mother do?" asked Jake.

"I can stay here alone. There is no horse nor cow to take care of, and you can come home Saturday nights. Eurilda has thought and prayed over this plan more than I, and, my son, perhaps we will do well to yield to her judgment."

This willingness of Mrs. Conway to let others form her judgment, and to lay domestic care upon any one who would bear it, was her great weakness. Yet it had sprung naturally from the treatment of her husband, for Simon Conway in his lifetime had never fretted her with responsibilities. Fervent as his love was, it was ever mistaken in carrying alone burdens that should have been divided with his wife.

Love is always overreaching prudence, and young wives will suffer it to be thus, forgetting that a husband whose kindness will not let them know a care, is but casting them as compassless, rudderless ships on the possible sea of widowhood and want.

It was well for Mrs Conway that Eurilda had been spared to her. Jake did not consent at once to this plan. The truth was, he was a little ashamed that Eurilda's ingenuity rather than his own had worked out the plan. He concluded before night that the scheme

was worth trying, and forthwith the family began to make preparations for its consummation.

"I might as well go to see Mr. Sarcott about the mortgage before we do much more," said Eurilda the day after the above conversation. "I think, mother, I will walk up there to-night. The road is frozen, and it is bright moonlight."

"Jacob can go with you," said the widow; but Jake demurred, and his mother did not urge him.

It must not be supposed that Jake was cowardly. That he had some reason for not going with Eurilda may be inferred from his saying: "You may go and see Mr. Sarcott if you want to, Sis, but I want to see Bob Loomis awhile to-night."

No caller would have been more welcome to Mr. Sarcott than the one he was about to have; for at the very moment when Eurilda rang the bell he was pacing up and down in his library thinking of the Conways.

Mary introduced Eurilda into the room, and Mr. Sarcott, concealing his surprise, received her with every mark of affability.

The girl, to relieve her embarrassment, had hardly taken the proffered chair before she began to announce the object of her visit.

"I came, Mr. Sarcott," she said, "to attend to a little matter of business for mother."

"You are right hand man, are n't you, 'Rilda?"

Eurilda blushed as she replied: "Mother is not very well, you know, and I try to do what I can to relieve her of her cares. I have called now to see you about the little mortgage you have on our place."

"Good!" thought Mr. Sarcott, "that 's just what has been uppermost in my mind the whole evening. If

I have not worked out my plans by means of the boy, who says the girl will fail me?" He almost snapped his fingers aloud, but he concealed his thoughts and said: "The mortgage! oh, yes, yes, that trifling mortgage; well, child, what do you want to know about it?"

Eurilda explained her plan. "Better yet," thought Mr. Sarcott. "This gives me a better opportunity than I dreamed of getting. Ha, ha."

"Ha, ha!"

Mr. Sarcott started slightly and looked at Eurilda. She was sitting undisturbed—she had evidently heard nothing.

She did not notice Mr. Sarcott's agitation, and he answered her aloud:

"Well, my child, the mortgage is not very large, and I would willingly consent to your plan, for I know such brave children as you and your brother are sure to carry out everything they undertake. But I have a little plan in mind that, now you are here, I may unfold. Indeed, I had thought of calling on your mother this very evening and unfolding it to her. I take it that you are a sensible girl, and will not think the plan so abrupt as I own it seems."

Eurilda's heart was in her mouth in an instant. Was he indeed going to press her to consent to a suit she thought he had abandoned long ago?

She was not deceived. "It may seem strange for me to say anything to you about this," continued Mr. Sarcott, "for your mother is the person immediately concerned. I have known her since she was a girl, my child. I have watched you two children grow up, and now"—here Mr. Sarcott cleared his throat—"what

would you say, my child, if I were to give you all a home with me?"

Eurilda comprehended him instantly, and her painful embarrassment was relieved by Mr. Sarcott when he said: "Of course, my girl, you can not answer for your mother; but tell me, have you and your brother any objections? Your mother will speak for herself, no doubt, but I want to know how you feel about it."

Mr. Sarcott was not prepared for Eurilda's answer:

"Sir, you have taken a mean advantage of a helpless girl, an advantage that does no credit to a man in your standing. I am sure my mother would marry no one, and certainly no one who scoffs at the very faith in which she has always lived. We may be poor, sir, but my brother and I wish no assistance purchased with money that has been gained as yours has."

She took her hat to go, when Mr. Sarcott, who hardly knew whether rage or shame had possession of him, spoke:

"So, ho! Your anger doesn't become a saintly young lady. You're rather saucy, it seems to me, for one who has come to ask favors. But may be, miss, your mother is of a different opinion. She probably does not countenance this thing of children's managing their parents quite as much as you think."

Eurilda made no answer, but, seizing her hat, rushed out of the house, her face glowing like a coal.

Half terrified and half angry, she related this singular interview to her mother, stopping at intervals to cry.

"Mother," said she, "I know you would never consent to become Mr. Sarcott's second wife; and as for Jake and me, how should we dare, after all you have

taught us, to depend for a living on a step-father whose money comes stamped with the bloated features of the drunkards he has made? No, no, mother, Jake and I will do anything; but promise me, mother, that you will never consent to this."

Before Mrs. Conway could reply to the frantic girl, there came a knock at the door, and the widow answered it only to confront Mr. Sarcott.

I will not introduce the reader to this interview. The village magnate had followed Eurilda home, determined to push matters to a crisis with Mrs. Conway herself. One word, though, the reader may be permitted to hear:

"Well, Amelia, as for that, I will not disturb your religious notions or prevent your children from attending church. Indeed, I may try to get a church here myself, by and by."

"Liar!" Mr. Sarcott heard this word distinctly. Yes, I assert strongly that he heard it, but I know full well that it did not come from the lips either of Eurilda or her mother.

"No, James, for my children's sake, this is my final answer." Mrs. Conway spoke as one who was making a desperate effort to shake off some terrible *nightmare*. When she had spoken she stood erect, and James Sarcott knew how completely he had failed.

He turned, and, without a word, left the house.

All this time Jake was unconscious of what was happening. He had left the cottage about the time that Eurilda did, and, by peering into the window of Bob Loomis' house, we may see him.

He stood with Bob beside the old desk. The smoky

lamp was in Bob's hand, and on the lid of the desk lay a paper.

"Did you find out all about it, Bob?" asked Jake.

"Yes, boy, I did that very thing. I was in Hanaford all day last Tuesday, and spent a good part of the time with Belden and Sprouts. I tell you, Jake, that 'ere Sprouts is as smart a lawyer as is in this yer country. 'Yes,' said he, 'Mr. Loomis, this paper shows plain enuff that that 'ere mortgige was released. As fur that matter, old Square Humpton, who drawed up this release, is livin' about two miles out of town, and we can hev his presence any time. Yer all safe, Mr. Loomis,' says he. 'Sarcott hez no more claim on that widow's property then you hev; this paper shows it clear enough.'"

Jake listened with the most intense interest. Presently Bob resumed:

"When the time comes, boy, we'll spring this on the old man, and no mistake. Just be patient awhile. But, Jake, how on arth do yer suppose that this paper come ter be lyin' around whar I picked it up?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNCLE JOE'S REMOVAL.

Long before Uncle Joe had taken the strange notion to sell his farm and move to Rising Branch, he had known of Mr. Sarcott's interview with the widow at the Conway cottage. Eurilda had never entirely recovered from the nervousness produced on that eventful night. About the time Uncle Joe had decided to leave his old home, she had returned to her mother's cottage, sick.

"A better girl never walked the earth," said Mrs. Cool, when she brought her home; "and I only wish she could have stayed."

Jake had come home from the woolen mill, and when he narrated Eurilda's story to Uncle Joe, the old man said to his wife:

"We must hurry, Samantha; fur as sure as we both were friends ter Simon Conway, we may hev a chance ter help Amelia more then we ever hev. I am anxious fur ye ter be near her."

Uncle Joe never faltered; yet as the time drew near when he should part with his boyhood's home, his heart almost misgave him.

On the forenoon of the late spring day on which the patriarch expected to conclude with his purchaser, he walked forth, cane in hand, to look once more over the old farm. Aunt Samantha was with him. They came to the end of a lane near where stood a large maple tree, and beside it a bowlder. Near the bowlder bubbled forth a spring, and the stream that trickled away from it ran with a mournful sound over the pebbles. How much of the music of our souls do we put into the world of nature! To Uncle Joe and Aunt Samantha the brook had never sung a funeral song before.

"Joseph! Joseph!" said Aunt Samantha, covering her face with her hands and leaning heavily upon her crutch, "this field was a part of the land my father gave me. Oh, Joseph, how can I?"

"Yes, Samantha," answered the old man, "and now before it are too late, ye can say the word, and the land this side of the lane will stay in yer name. It are yours, and I hev no wish to part with it if ye are unwillin'. But, as fur me, my mind is made up. The old homestead must be laid on the altar; and I feel happy in doin' it."

"No, Joseph," answered his wife, "I will not be behind yer in good works. If yer land goes, so must mine. If I could only be sure that we are not hevin' zeal without knowledge!"

Uncle Joe was silent. Aunt Samantha's thought impressed him. Was he not more foolish than wise? Did the Lord require any such sacrifice? And, after all, were his motives right? Once more his old-time enemy came back to vex him. Was he not seeking glory from men?

I have heard it said that only once in a lifetime is a man called on to fight the great battle of Armageddon, and if he gains the victory he is safe forever. But I do not believe it. Apollyon contests every inch of the way. Over against the plaudit of "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," the Christian hears the baffled tempter's cry of rage.

Uncle Joe had met the tempter again. "Little do you care for the work of the Lord." "Does n't it flatter you to think how the people will talk of Sales' church?" "Will it not tickle your vanity when the religious papers notice your generous gift and speak of your unselfish sacrifice?" These were the thoughts that chased each other through his mind. He told them to Aunt Samantha.

"Ah, Joseph," said the good old woman, "I can not think that them are yer motives. But we would do well ter pray to God that we be kept from sacrificin' our few comforts to minister to our pride." She pulled Uncle Joe's coat, and together they knelt on the green grass and prayed.

When they arose, Uncle Joe said: "Now, Samantha, I am prepared to say farewell, and be glad."

They walked over the old place, noting every spot that had been familiar through so many years. Numberless were the memories called up by trees, and rocks, and landmarks they had known from childhood. As they walked slowly homeward, Uncle Joe quoted in a low voice, "Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto the things that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

And so the old farm went. Hand in hand this aged

couple went out from their home. A humble little cottage in Rising Branch received them. Uncle Joe had bought it in the early summer, and though it was a little too modern for good old Aunt Samantha, she said nothing but: "Well, I 'll miss our big kitchen in this little tucked-up house, but then, Joseph, we will not need a house long."

"No," said her husband, "and we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God."

But the world said that old Joe Sales was a fool.

. . . . . .

We have already seen how Mr. Sarcott looked upon Uncle Joe's prospect. He at first treated it as a joke, but when he was convinced that the old man was in earnest, he made ready to foil him. His feelings had not been improved by the treatment he had received from Mrs. Conway.

A few days after Uncle Joe had removed to the village, Mr. Sarcott sought the seclusion of his library to prepare another scheme.

"Well," said he to himself, "I will have to do it, and if she refuses, then I will do it." He hit the table so forcibly with his fist that old Pindar, who lay under it, sprang up with a savage growl.

"Go down to Nannie, sir," said Mr. Sarcott, and the dog obeyed, leaving the bad man to his pet occupation of scheming. He began his customary talk to himself.

"So old Sales, the crazy fool, is going to put his money into a church, and going to get that little triangular lot of the widow to build it on! What a pity that little spot was n't covered by the mortgage! Why

can't it be? That's it, why can't it be? Well, well, why did I not think of it before? It can be written in now. Of course it can. I'm lawyer enough to word it myself. The only trouble will be the *record*. Let me see. George Tukeman is Recorder *now*. Ha, ha! A few shiners will fix George. He'll get the record shaped all right. I'll do it. I will try the widow once more. Now the girl is sick, I know they must be pressed for money. May be she will think different of it now. If she refuses"—here a look half of determination, half of guilt mingled with shame, crossed Mr. Sarcott's face—"I'll foreclose. May be old Dad Sales will need his surplus money then to help his friends."

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

"That Mary again!" exclaimed Mr. Sarcott. "But no, she has gone out with Nannie. How loud some of those old texts seem to ring in a fellow's mind!"

That evening Mr. Sarcott was seen driving rapidly toward Hanaford.

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It was Saturday evening, and earlier than usual the crowd had begun to assemble at Mr. Dill's store. Summer had come with all its heat, but this evening a thunder-gust had cleared the air. Among the motley assemblage was Bose Compton. He had been drinking, and was very talkative.

"See here, you fellers," said he, addressing no one in particular, "hev you heard that they hev fetched them Italyuns?"

"Have they, Bose?"

"That's what I heard yisterday in Hanaford. Every one of them is going to be sent up."

"Good thing that Dave and young Timmons made tracks," said some one.

"Dave are safe enuff," said Bose, "but young Timmons will be fool enough to be catched yit."

"Why, Bose, what do you mean?"

"Hey!" replied Bose with a knowing leer, "you fellers are green if you think Timmons is very far off. Bet Jim Sarcott's oldest gal knows more 'n she 'll tell."

The crowd eyed Bose curiously.

"Yes, I mean it," said he. "You fellers just wait and you 'll hear of something one of these days."

No amount of coaxing could induce Bose to explain his enigmatical language. He became very loud and boisterous, however, and Mr. Dill, ensconcing himself carefully behind the bar, ordered Jimmy the clerk to drive him out.

"Never mind," shouted Bose as he went, "you 'll hear somethin' drop afore long."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A REVELATION.

Mr. Sarcott well knew the great weakness of Mrs. Conway. "She 's strong when she has props enough," said he to himself, as he was walking one morning toward the railroad to oversee his workmen. "I must weaken Dad Sales' influence upon her. That I can do by exposing to her his folly in this last movement of his. The girl is sick, and that may help me. She has her father's will, and I do believe she inherits some of his dislike to me. Simon Conway was always in my way. He came between me and Amelia when we were young, and now his spirit, embodied in that girl, stands in the same place. But ha, ha! what talk is this for me? We 'll soon see whether matter or spirit rules things hereabouts."

As he spoke he rattled a heavy purse in his pocket as though some of the matter aforesaid were waiting on him, subject to his will. He stopped under the old oak tree in the lane and drew a paper from his pocket. He chuckled as he perused it, and exclaimed, "How like a fool I 'll make the old saint appear to her."

He had not noticed the spot at which he had arrived until the deep shadow of the old tree fell heavy on the grass before him. He was about to continue his reverie, but something caused him to pause. Uncle Joe's prophecy rushed unbidden to memory.

"Yes, yes; I have no doubt about it a growin', but in the shadder of its arthly prosperity the generation that are comin' up will become as stunted as the bushes tryin' ter grow in the shadder of that oak."

Mr. Sarcott glanced toward the village. Certainly four years had wrought a great outward change. Its neat white cottages nestled among the trees, and the big hall, with its flag-staff reaching skyward, overtopped them all. Mr. Dill's brick store and the new tavern gave an air of business to the place that certainly verified the magnate's early predictions. But the prophecy of Uncle Joe—had it been fulfilled? Certainly not in the letter, for time for a new generation to grow had not passed. But what of its spirit?

Mr. Sarcott would gladly have changed the train of his thought, but he could not. What a change had been wrought in human lives! Mollie Stormer was a hopeless maniac; poor Jeff was a drunkard; young Haines was fast becoming one; the elder Haines had twice suffered from delirium tremens; David, the hostler, was a fugitive from justice; young Timmons was his companion, and Jake Conway had been swerved from a high purpose. Was this prosperity?

"Oh, pshaw!" said Mr. Sarcott, wincing under the goads of conscience, "these things would have happened anyhow. I did a good thing for that boy to get him out of the preaching notion, even if the family are a little cranky now. I must be getting conscientious to

let these things bother me. I think I am as sure of heaven as the most of the saints."

This oft-repeated self-consolation had but little effect, for Mr. Sarcott moved from under the shadow of the great tree with an uneasy gait, and a face full of perplexity.

He happened to turn his eyes once more in the direction of the village; he had urgent business among the hands employed on the long line of embankment before him, but something kept him from pushing it. The village! the village! he could not get it out of his thoughts.

Something in the little lot above the widow Conway's arrested his attention. It was a team of horses hitched to a plow.

"I believe," said he, "they're going to plow in that lot. No, that can't be it. Yes they are, too; but as sure as I live it is not for a crop. Can it be possible that old Dad Sales is going to commence that church?"

He started at once toward the lot, talking rapidly to himself. He could plainly see Uncle Joe Sales, old Father Leeb, and several others, in the road near the fence. A tall man, rather well dressed in black, and wearing a high hat, seemed to be talking with Uncle Joe.

"That is that crank preacher that coaxed the old man into this fool scheme," said Mr. Sarcott. "Heavens! what a fire-ball I'll drop in among them!"

As he said this he crossed the fence that separated him from the main road. A sawdust walk skirted it on the outside, and the magnate had barely touched it when a shadow fell before him. He looked up, and encountered Mrs. Conway.

So suddenly had she appeared that he had not time to frame one of his wary, dissimulating greetings. He stammered out:

"Why, Amelia, is it you? Well, how goes the battle?"

Mrs. Conway looked up. Her face was red, and she had evidently been crying.

"Not very well, James. Eurilda is quite sick this morning. I was going to the post-office to send a note for Dr. Peters."

There was something so tender in her tone, and in her face something that seemed so much to crave sympathy, or, as Mr. Sarcott translated it, assistance, that all of his old-time endeavor was roused again to a new action.

"Amelia!" He repeated but the one word, and looked her steadily in the eye. There was no need of further conversation, for the widow felt that in that one word Mr. Sarcott had repeated all the importunity of his previous encounter.

She cast down her face, and Mr. Sarcott knew that an inward struggle was again tormenting her.

He was right. Rapidly as the shadows roll over the fields, when the wind drives the clouds across the sun, did two pictures chase each other through her mind. Mr. Sarcott was not so bad a man after all, and he could do so much for her children. May be she could do much for his. It was but a fair exchange. Perhaps her friends were wrong in dissuading her. She was alone, and in her weakness had well-nigh yielded.

But the vision of her sick child came before her, and as the thought of Eurilda's wishes rose before her the first picture vanished, and Mr. Sarcott became a

cold, scheming man. He would make her life miserable with his unbelief and settle Jake hopelessly in the way of worldliness.

"No, James, not now. I can not, I can not."

Mr. Sarcott had always prided himself on being a mind reader. So certainly had he argued, from the widow's face, to a favorable answer, that her words came with the very sword-thrust of disappointment. He was angry. He spoke excitedly, and what he said was so utterly unpremeditated that it had no more than escaped his lips before he cursed himself for saying it.

"Well, then, be a fool. I have tried to help you, so now take the consequences. You might as well know that I have filed a notice of foreclosure on the place. Business is pressing, and if your other friends can help you more than I, now is their time. Three months is the best I can do for you."

The widow made no answer, but it was well that Mr. Sarcott did not see her face. She hastened on, and the great man in a very bad humor approached the lot.

He came up to Uncle Joe with a frown. "Well, Sales, you are bound to be a Solomon, are you? When did the Lord call you to build his temple, anyhow?"

"I make no pertenshuns ter bein' a Solomon, James, nor hez the Lord called me ter build him a house any more than he hez you."

"Well, he has not called me, unless it is to know who gave you a right to trespass on this property."

Uncle Joe looked up in surprise.

"Yes, that 's just what I mean," said Mr. Sarcott.

"What, Joseph," said Father Leeb in great

astonishment, "I understood you that this lot was Amelia's."

"So it are," answered Uncle Joe, a little tartly; "I do n't know what James means."

"I mean," said Mr. Sarcott, "that this lot is included in the mortgage I have on the widow's place, and she has no power to transfer it without my consent, for the mortgage is overdue, and I have determined to foreclose."

"What, James!" replied Uncle Joe; "I thought you war goin' ter give the widder a chance ter redeem her home, and surely we kin help her do it if yer do not push us."

"I can 't wait any longer, and I won 't," said Mr. Sarcott, angrily, "and now this business of yours had better stop, before I have it stopped for you."

"Why, James," pleaded Uncle Joe, "the widder surely do n't think this lot are covered by the mortgige. She told me she had held ter it, and it were free."

"Well, she is mistaken, and that badly. If you do n't look up these things for yourself, it is not my fault. It seems to me if you would mind your own business, and put your church down at Craggy Hill where it ought to be, you would be wise. As for you, sir," here Mr. Sarcott turned to Elder Tarford, "you ought to be in better business than to delude a few dotards into schemes for enriching a clergy already so corrupt as to be a disgrace in our land."

Elder Tarford knew not what to reply. Uncle Joe, however, saved him any attempt to do so.

"Yer must be mistaken, James, about this lot."

"I am not mistaken," replied Mr. Sarcott with an oath, "and I want you to know it. I told you four

years ago that we did n't need any of this church nonsense here, and now I tell you again we are not going to have it."

Uncle Joe made no answer. He had whispered to Elder Tarford, and that gentleman walked immediately to the cottage.

Hardly had he entered it, when Jake was seen to emerge and walk toward Bob Loomis' shop.

Bob Loomis was shoeing a horse. Jake ran in, all out of breath. "Bob, quick, get that paper and come over to the lot; the time has come sooner than we thought."

"Go it," shouted Bob, slapping the horse with his hand and almost bounding into the house, "I 'm yer man."

He returned, and with him came an old gray-haired man leaning upon a cane.

"Yer see, Jake, the Square is my father-in-lar, and I hev hed him here a visitin' fur several days hopin' we might need him, and here 's a chance. Hooray!"

The trio approached the lot, where Mr. Sarcott's voice rose in loud tones.

"The old man must be mad. We 'll make him madder," said Bob.

As Bob climbed the fence Uncle Joe advanced to meet him, and said: "I think Robert Loomis here kin explain this matter."

Mr. Sarcott turning, saw Bob, and, catching Uncle Joe's remark, he burst out into a perfect fit of rage and surprise.

"What do you mean, you old hypocrite? Does your Bible teach you to insult honest men? Am I a liar?"

"Give me that paper, Robert," said the old man, at the same time taking it from Bob's outstretched hand.

"What!" said Mr. Sarcott in amazement, "has this traitor been in your employ?"

Uncle Joe handed the paper to Elder Tarford, who had returned. A silence fell on all as the elder unfolded it and read. Mr. Sarcott, shading his eyes, looked keenly at the paper:

HANAFORD, November 5, 18—.

In consideration of the amount of $——, paid to me this day by Simon Conway, being the amount of a mortgage held by me on the herein described real estate of Simon Conway aforesaid (here followed a description of the Conway home), I do hereby release all my claims, and the claims of my heirs and assigns, to the property afore mentioned and herein described, and all rights and privileges declared in said mortgage are hereby relinquished; and this paper is given to witness that any claim hereafter preferred by any of my executors, heirs or assigns, in consideration of the terms declared in this mortgage, is and shall be invalid. JAMES SARCOTT.

In witness whereof I have subscribed my name and affixed the seal of my office. L. HAMPTON, Notary Public.

"You have robbed my house of private papers!" shouted Mr. Sarcott, starting toward Bob with clenched fist.

"So ho!" shouted Bob, "yer must hev hed the paper, then."

Mr. Sarcott saw his mistake instantly. "It is a base forgery," he cried, "and I—"

"Here's some one as kin tell if it is or no," said the blacksmith, at the same time giving a sharp whistle.

The old gray-haired man, who until now had remained, at Bob's bidding, concealed beyond the fence, now climbed over with difficulty and approached. Had

the ghost of his dead wife appeared, Mr. Sarcott would not have turned paler. He stood transfixed, with a look of horror on his face.

"Why, Jim," said the old man, slowly, "yer need n't be skeered. I know I hev bin reported dead this many a year, but, as yer see, I ain't. I drifted out ter Californy, time o' the gold fever, stumped about the mines awhile, then went ter sea, and was as good as dead fur all any one knew. I got back ter my son's, over by Hannyford, a month back, and this fool blacksmith got me over here day afore yesterday, seein' as he run off with my gal years ago. Well, now, Jim, yer might as well own up. Yer know that Simon paid yer that mortgige, and I drawed up that paper, which yer signed. Of course no one dreamed then that old Square Hampton were goin' ter become an outcast, but I did, after my Huldy died, and the whisky yer made in yer distillery over at Hannyford is what did it. But I 'm here, Jim, and kin testify to the genooiness of that paper. I dunno how yer ever got the mortgige inter yer hands agin."

"'T is forgery and blackmail," said Mr. Sarcott, but his voice was low; he trembled in every limb, and a cold sweat stood on his forehead in great drops.

Half an hour later Mr. Sarcott entered his library. He rushed, rather than walked, to his desk and threw open the drawer. The papers were there as Nannie had left them; but one paper was gone.

"Who in heaven's name," cried the astonished man, beating his breast, "has ever been to this drawer?"

Old Pindar lay under the table panting, but he only eyed his master and volunteered no information.

. . . . . .

"Bob," said Jake, after Mr. Sarcott had gone, "is the old Squire your father-in-law?"

"He are," said Bob. "He left this town years ago, arter I ran away with Laury, which proceedin' killed her mother, and set the old man ter drinkin'. I thought he hed died in Californy, and I found out of his comin' back when I war workin' that Pounds bisness fur yer."

. . . . . .

Mr. Sarcott had been about an hour in his library when he was aroused from his dejection by the sound of Nannie's crying. He hastened down stairs, and on the landing met Mary.

"What is the matter?" he demanded.

"Oh, only a little more fruit from the tree you have been nourishing," said Mary, coolly.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, papa, Jennie is gone, Jennie is gone!" shouted Nannie, appearing in the hall.

"Look here, James," said Mary, showing the way to Jennie's room. Everything was in confusion. The bureau was open, and its drawers were empty.

"What is it? What do you mean?" fairly shrieked the excited man.

"I mean nothing but what you can see except this." She handed him a crumpled envelope.

He read: "All right, Jen, meet me at (here the paper was torn) Bose will—" There was nothing more to be made out but, "have the cash, be sure.—Will."

Mr. Sarcott could not speak.

"Listen, James," said Mary. "Be still, Nannie. I I have suspected, from talk dropped by that drunken Bose Compton, that Will Timmons has not been as far away as some think. He has had correspondence with Jennie all this summer, and some how has allured her away. It is plain that she has eloped with him. When and how I do not know."

A loud knocking at the door now interrupted them. Mary opened it. A young man handed her a letter. Mr. Sarcott snatched it and broke the seal. It was a notice from the Bank of Hanaford that his last checks were protested. Two checks were enclosed, and "No funds" written on them.

"You see, sir," said the messenger, "that within the last month several large amounts have been paid on checks to your order. They were sent from here by mail, and the money sent back in the same way. Your funds are exhausted, and the cashier sent me to see you."

Mr. Sarcott, bidding the man to await his return, immediately went to Mr. Dill's store, where the post-office was kept.

A hasty investigation revealed all. Jennie had sent letters directed to the Hanaford Bank. Mr. Dill, too stupid to notice anything wrong, had never mentioned it to her father.

"My God," said Mr. Sarcott, "she could imitate my writing exactly, and has been persuaded by that young wretch to forge my name."

In less than a week a detective had arrested Bose Compton. He had allowed young Timmons to make his house a secret place of retreat, had helped him

away with Jennie, and had received some of the stolen money.

At the bank it was discovered that eight checks had been sent to Rising Branch, the cashier thinking that Mr. Sarcott had signed them, his signature being so peculiar. The forger was certainly an expert. Twenty thousand dollars had been drawn in the big man's name. Like wildfire the news spread, and with it circulated the report that the contractor had thereby failed, and the railroad was for the time to stand still.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MOB.

The Saturday night that followed these events was long remembered by the inhabitants of Rising Branch.

"He hez failed!" said Colby Haines, as he reeled along the street.

The cry was taken up by many of the laborers, who had congregated at the store.

"He owes me a hundred dollars," cried one.

"Every man that worked for him will lose the last month's wages," shouted another.

"The road 's gone up!"

"Good-bye stockholders!"

"Let 's have it out of him!"

"He owns this store; let 's go for it!"

This last cry was a signal for a general uprising. A wild mob of laborers, a few Italians among them, and Colby Haines at their head, rushed with drunken shouts toward the store. Mr. Dill fled at the back door.

The bar was sacked, and the mob, becoming more drunken, filled the night with hideous cries.

"To his house! to his house! Don't let him get away with his pockets full."

"He has money enough to pay us—let's have it!"

Oaths and cries filled the air as the mob rushed toward the mansion of the unfortunate man.

"Bust in the door!" "Hang him!" "Where's our pay?"

Two stalwart men had seized a big plank and were starting toward the house, when the door opened and revealed a picture that made the mob quail.

The big chandelier hung lighted in the hall-way. Before it stood Mary. She was clad in black; her hair fell down on her shoulders, while her dark eyes, ablaze with wrath, glanced along the polished barrel of a large pistol.

The men dropped the plank, leaving Colby Haines, who stood behind them, to face the apparition.

"I shall defend this house, by God's help," said the woman. "Colby, wretched drunkard that you are, do you realize what you are doing?"

Colby stood as though frozen. The loud shouts ceased, and in the lull Mary stepped forward and spoke:

"Fools, will you add murder and arson to this Satanic outburst? The man you want is not dunce enough to fall into your hands. He is not here. Who told you that you would lose your pay? Every cent will be paid. I know it. Go, you demons, do not dare to force this door. You will curse this night's folly when you get sober."

The crowd fell back, and a prolonged murmur swept it like a low wind in the forest. Three or four oaths broke the stillness. They were but receding thunders, for the storm had passed.

But what of Mr. Sarcott?

The week was drawing to a close. Rumors of all kinds had been circulated among the railroad hands. Deeper and deeper grew the anxiety as pay-day evening approached. Nobody was working in the afternoon, and many voices were inquiring for the contractor. There was a little office in the front part of Mr. Dill's store, where all the business of the road had been transacted. It had been deserted for several days.

"Indeed, I do not know," said Mr. Dill, wringing his hands. "I am as anxious as you are to know where he is. Indeed—ah, I assure you—gentlemen, truly I am in ignorance. His housekeeper would not even admit me. Indeed, I—"

"Who is that?"

A two-horse barouche had stopped before the store a man alighted and gave Mr. Dill a paper.

"We will take possession Monday," said he. Mr. Dill turned toward the counter. Colby Haines was the first man who spoke.

"Assigned?"

Mr. Dill nodded.

The drunkard rushed into the street with the cry upon his lips.

. . . . . .

Up and down, up and down, walked Mr. Sarcott in his library, with his hands folded behind him and his head bowed.

"Retribution, retribution!" murmured he as he walked.

"Why did you not listen to the voice of your better self?"

Mr. Sarcott stopped suddenly.

"I mean what I say," continued Mary, with her dark eyes flashing upon him.

"I have heard no voices but yours. Every now and then you have flung some of my sins into my teeth," replied Mr. Sarcott.

"You have not heard me as often as you think," returned the woman. "Conscience has a loud voice sometimes. But listen! Do you know, James Sarcott, that there is every sign of a riot in the village? You are not safe here."

"How has the news of my assignment got abroad?"

"How should I know?" answered Mary; "but I tell you you are not safe here. No doubt your own whisky is helping to infuriate these men. Go, let me meet them."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Sarcott, "I leave my house to a howling mob and flee, thrusting a woman between me and danger! Are you mad? Are you crazy? Did I ever act the coward? Go yourself; take Nannie and leave the house at the back door. Give me my pistol, and—"

"Hush!" answered Mary, and a moment of quiet followed, broken by the shouts and cries of the approaching mob.

"James," said she, "these men are furious with drink. One glimpse of you would turn them into fiends. Go, I tell you, quickly to Uncle Joe's; you can reach there by the back lane. If any one can quell this angry sea, it is he. Come back then, if you fear the imputation of cowardice. But as you are, I know you or they would shed blood. Will you complete with a pistol what your cursed liquor has begun? Go, I tell you, and speak to Uncle Joe."

And Mr. Sarcott went out into that summer night, that he might be saved from the brand of Cain.

"I would be a murderer if it were not for her," siad he, when Uncle Joe's astonishment had subsided. "God's wrath has overtaken me, and I can not sink myself deeper into perdition. She says you must come. I have obeyed her, as I always have. I can not help it."

"God be praised," answered Uncle Joe, "that she has saved you from this. Samantha—"

"I want nothing," said Mr. Sarcott, "I will return with Uncle Joe. Be quick! do you not hear the cursed wretches?"

Uncle Joe started from his house, and as he went he murmured: "I go in the name of the Lord of hosts, who will shield me from this Goliath of sin as he did his sarvint David."

The reader knows how, in the interval, the dark-eyed governess had met the cowardly mob. A few shouts, a random shot or two, some loud oaths and much angry talking, told that the remnant of the mob had come back to the front of the store. Thither Uncle Joe made his way. His bent form coming out of the darkness was a signal for silence.

"'T is old Sales," whispered a man. The crowd parted, and in a moment the old man stood in the midst.

"Boys," said he, in a voice clear as a silver bell, "I have some news."

"Go on," shouted some one.

"Every cent of this indebtedness shall be paid, and no man shall lose a dollar."

"Who said so?"

"I said so," shouted the old man in a voice of thunder, "and Joseph Sales never lied."

"Do you know it, Daddy—are you certain?"

"As a man and before God," cried the old man, "I tell you I know the condition of this estate, and every rod of it will go before a laborer shall lose a penny."

"Good for the old man. He's all right; he knows."

These and similar shouts, accompanied occasionally by the crack of a pistol fired into the air, continued for some time after the old man had disappeared; but gradually quiet settled over the excited town.

Uncle Joe left the street, and joined Mr. Sarcott under the old oak.

"James, I have given them my word," said he, "on your representation. It can't be that yer a deceivin' me."

"Everything I have shall go," answered the distressed man, "before any one shall lose a cent."

"And now, James," said Uncle Joe, "yer hev sartainly come to the hour of retribution; tell me, in this moment when ye hev met God face ter face, how did yer come ter hev thet mortgige and thet release in yer possession?"

"This is certainly a fitting place for a confession!" said Mr. Sarcott, as he glanced up into the dark, gloomy branches of the old tree. "I will tell you, Uncle Joe. When Simon Conway and I had settled that affair in the office of old Squire Hampton, Simon went out, forgetting to take those papers. I picked them up; he was taken sick that very day. I knew he had not told his wife of the transaction, and I kept the

papers. My own wife was dead. I hoped some day to use them as you see. I wanted to make money. From the curse of the instrumentalities by which I hoped to get rich I was selfish enough to want to shield my own children. Why not give them Amelia Conway for a step-mother? But you know the rest; now tell me how you and Bob came by that paper."

Uncle Joe told him.

"Whom I chose to be my tool in iniquity, has been turned to my destruction."

"Aye," said Uncle Joe solemnly; then after a pause, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

The late night wind sounded through the branches of the oak.

"It sounds like a requiem," said Mr. Sarcott; "God grant it may be one of my past life."

"And that you may awake to a better," said Uncle Joe.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WHITE CHURCH, EURILDA, AND UNCLE JOE.

Life had not wholly ceased in Rising Branch. Indeed, there was some bustle there, but how different was the cause. A few weeks before, the building of the railroad had been the main-spring of all its activity; now it was the building of the little church. Uncle Joe had given half his means to this end; the work had been let, and slowly but surely the temple of God began to arise in the godless town. Every bit of Mr. Sarcott's property was sold to cover his indebtedness. The big house was shut up. A clerk employed by the assignees was in the store, and the Sarcott family was gone. Rumor said that Mr. Sarcott was sick at the home of a relative in Carterville.

It was with satisfaction that Uncle Joe saw the little chapel rising to completion. Every day he hobbled forth to watch the workmen. A monotony, made doubly apparent by the era of prosperity that preceded it, was relieved by the sound of saw and hammer and the rattling of occasional loads of lumber over the dusty road. The best inhabitants of the vil-

lage, wrecked in fortune and blasted in hopes, now blessed the old man's enterprise. It was to them the sign of heart-beat in a town well nigh fallen into the hands of death.

At last the building was enclosed, and the master-workman came to Uncle Joe to consult about its color.

"Paint it white," said the old man, with great emphasis, "paint it white—the only color fit fur one o' the Lord's sanctooaries; but let the blinds be green, like the folyage of his own woods, or the color of the great sea he controls."

And so the little chapel was painted white, and the setting sun of those fading summer days touched the gilded ball on the spire, until it shone with a radiance that found its counterpart in Uncle Joe's heart.

But a cloud was in the sky of the old man's joy. What it was, the reader may know as he catches a fragment of this conversation with Mrs. Conway.

"Oh, Uncle Joe, these shattered hopes, these ruined fortunes are not the only results of his folly. Who shall turn back the thought of my poor boy from the allurements of the world to that calling into which his father, when he died, believed he had directed him? and oh, who shall relieve me of this burden of guilt, the thought of my own weakness, my own want of faith?"

"Look ter God, Amelia," replied Uncle Joe in a sympathetic tone; "but is it indeed as bad as this?"

"Yes," replied the widow; "every day but confirms Jake's dislike to all things religious."

"I see he hez never once kem near the chapel," said the old man; "but I thought he war busy down in Hanny-ford, and had n't the time."

"He has studiously avoided it," replied the widow;

"he talks only of getting a better salary, of wanting to be rich, and the home he will some day get for me and 'Rilda. He laments the failure of the railroad here only because it makes the town dull."

Mrs. Conway was right. Nothing was more marked than Jake's utter commitment to things of the earth, earthy.

Day by day he built his castles in the air. They were all of one kind. He walked in the very midst of his own houses and lands. The big house of Mr. Sarcott was his. The store was his. He owned half a dozen cottages. The railroad was in full operation and he was a stockholder. He made the most elaborate calculations of his daily income. Now it was so much, now a little more, to-day a little less. Sometimes he changed the scene. He lived at Hanaford now in a house as real in existence as its ownership was imaginary. He had it arranged just so. Now his mother and Eurilda lived with him. Now he was married and they lived in a neat house close by, a gift from him. His dreamy manner sometimes led him into trouble. He was forgetful and his employers sometimes admonished him. He came home on Saturdays. He was home, as we have seen, when the revelation of Bob's paper had so strangely relieved his family of a great care. One thing in the interval of these visits troubled him, and often brought him out of his reveries into reality. It was the pale face of Eurilda. When the big woods that lay far up the Branch beyond Craggy Hill were resounding to the songs of a Harvest Home festival, it was reported that she was dying, and kind neighbors hastened to the Conway cottage to find, indeed, a very sick girl and a frightened family.

Jake's face was pale and no eye scanned the doctor's face more anxiously then did his.

It was the last day of summer. So Aunt Samantha had said when she came that morning to visit Eurilda, and the girl had answered, "Yes, Aunt Samantha, and the brief summer of my life is almost gone."

Jake was overcome with emotion. Eurilda caught sight of him and eagerly beckoned him to her.

"Jake, I know that my end is near; bend down here, O brother; I will go happy if only—Jake, are you listening?" The boy threw his arms about her neck and wept.

"Gently, my lad," said Dr. Peters, softly disengaging him, "put your ear down; she can whisper, but that is all."

"O, Jake, promise me, here before mother and all, will you?"

"Anything, O Eurilda, anything; but I can not let you go."

"Did you say *anything* Jake?"

"Yes, *anything*."

"Then promise me here that you will follow the wish of your father to preach Christ's gospel to perishing men."

There was a strange and solemn pause. The widow's head was bowed and in silent prayer knelt Uncle Joe and his aged wife beside the bed.

"I go to meet father; Jake, shall I tell him?"

For a moment the boy hesitated. Even there at the bedside of his sister he felt the tempter's hand upon his heart.

It was but a moment. "I will, Eurilda."

"Amen," said Uncle Joe, "Amen, Amen."

Come softly, O summer night! Moan gently, O twilight breeze! The Conway cottage is silent now; but who shall fail to read the lesson? A life turned again to the path of rectitude. A life sacrificed to accomplish it.

. . . . . .

There is a time of year I call transition time; it is when summer fades insensibly into autumn, and the music of the katy-dids nightly attends the transformation.

This time had come. A new grave had been made at Craggy Hill; a new church had been finished in Rising Branch. There was to be a dedication. Around the grave, the hearts of two lingered in the first dark hours of a bitter bereavement. Around the church gathered the hopes of a neighborhood in the first bright hours of a coming morn.

"'Tis the Lord's own day, Samantha," cried Uncle Joe, "and ter-day we are ter give ter him our chapel."

The old couple bustled about with youthful alacrity; and well they might, for to both of them it was a day of triumph.

"The Elder will be here before we're ready, Samantha," said the old man, nervously, "and jest see how the people are a pilin' in."

"Don't be flattered at that, Joseph," said Aunt Samantha; "curiosity, I fear, more than anythin' else, explains thet."

"I know it," said the old man, in reply; "but the Lord's word may be blessed among 'em, fur all thet. Didn't ye read in some book of them that kem ter scoff, and stayed ter pray?"

"I did," answered the good old woman, "and I hope this day will see seed sowed that will bear fruit."

Oh, what a crowd gathered to the dedication! Not one-half of them could get inside; and when it was proposed to go out and hold the services on the beautiful green in front of the church, the movement was received with great joy.

. . . . . .

The earnest and eloquent sermon of Elder Tarford was ended. Impressive as it had been, it was not more so than when he said:

"And now, my friends and brethren, we owe this house, under God, to the self-sacrifice of one man. I have not asked him, but I ask you, shall he be allowed to bear this burden alone?"

The Elder said not another word. A glance at the congregation would have shown at once the score that were eager to contribute; but before any movement could be made to satisfy their desires, a man arose, and a general stillness followed. It was Elder Tribbey. He advanced, and, grasping the astonished old man by the hand, said:

"Brother Sales, I speak for Craggy Hill. In the presence of these witnesses we acknowledge our mistake. Brother Tarford's preaching has powerfully moved us, but not so much so as the manifestations of God's displeasure on this unhappy village. We come as a congregation, and ask to unite our efforts with yours to build up in this place the cause of Christ."

The echo of these words had not died, when another form arose from beside a tree near the stand, and walked slowly into the midst of the people. No wonder they were astonished. No wonder Uncle Joe grasped the coat of Elder Tarford to keep from falling.

"Be calm, my friends. It is I. I see you are

amazed to see me here, nor shall I explain how I came. I have other things to say."

Taking his place a little to one side Mr. Sarcott pointed, with a hand sadly emaciated, toward the deserted railroad embankment that stretched away in full sight of the people.

"Yonder," said he, in a tone almost sepulchral, "is my work begun four years ago, in the flush of my pride and the blindness of my infidelity. Look at it. It is desolate and abandoned." Then he pointed the same bony hand toward the white church, whose spire now blazed in the glory of the afternoon sun, and added, "Here is the work of God that I opposed." He was silent for a moment, and then, turning slowly toward the congregation, he asked: "And do you read the lesson?"

The reply was from Elder Tarford: "But if it be of God, ye can not overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And now, my brother," continued the Elder, "these are no doubt the days of your repentance. Come—"

"No," said Mr. Sarcott, waving him away, "not yet. When I have brought forth fruit meet for repentance, then, and not till then."

The excitement had been too much for Uncle Joe. Out of pure excess of joy he fainted away, and they bore him to his cottage, where he awoke in the delirium of fever. At intervals through the night he shouted: "It hez kem, it hez kem! the Lord be praised! the mornin' of a new day is kem ter Risin' Branch."

As days wore on he grew no better; but it was in a

moment of perfect lucidity that he called his good wife to him and said:

"Samantha, I would die happier yit, if some one could whisper thet James had formilly give his heart ter God."

"He will come, Joseph," answered she, "he will come. God has called him ter endoor another afflicshun. I wish yer might be spared the pain of knowin' it."

"What?" asked Uncle Joe, anxiously.

"His Jennie are come home ter die. She war abandoned by that wretch, and now she hez come home ter James' sisters in Carterville. Consumpshin will soon relieve her of the burdins of life. And, Joseph, she hez give the remnint of her days ter God. 'Tis late, I know, but oh, who is ter blame? No wonder James said: 'Let me bring forth fruit meet fur repentince.'"

"Push my lounge near ter the winder, Samantha, thet I may see the little chapel."

Aunt Samantha did so, and presently the old man spoke again:

"Samantha, our own children hev laid in the grave this many a year. We leave no child to perpetooate our name or continner the good we have been tryin' ter do. Our earthly means is almost gone, and our lives, specially mine, is nigh on ter ended." He pointed to the church, and asked, "Are yer sorry, Samantha, we made the sacrifice?"

"No," said Aunt Samantha, "blessed be the Lord."

The delirium returned, and the old man grew flighty. He insisted on lying on a lounge at the

window and gazing at the spire of the little church. There came a night when the moon was full, and filled the midnight sky with light.

Uncle Joe lay gazing at the gilded ball upon the spire. Its dark side was toward him. Suddenly the moon sailed from behind it and bathed it in silver light.

"It 's a sign, it 's a sign!" shouted the dying man. "God is pleased with my work, and I am lookin' at the glory of his presence."

Poor old Uncle Joe! He raised his hands and gazed with rapt attention on the beautiful scene. Then his head sank down and his arms fell at his side.

There was a low sigh from Aunt Samantha, and the old clock was slowly striking twelve.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

A few years ago business called me to the town of Hanaford. A iittie beyond the station I saw a track which branched off to the right.

"Is that a switch?" I asked a bystander.

"Oh, no," was the reply, "that's where the road branches off to Carterville."

"What! over through Rising Branch?"

"Yes."

"Has that road been built?"

"Oh, yes;" answered my friend; "several years now. You see, the first contractor failed, and the project fell through. A new company got hold of the road, though, and five years ago it was finished. You see, that road was bound to come sometime; there are no richer lands in the country than those down this valley. Here is the local freight for Carterville now."

Instantly an impulse seized me to visit Rising Branch. It would be out of my way, but I had time.

I boarded the dingy caboose, and sat for a long time speculating on the great changes that would meet my eye. It seemed as though the switching would

never be done. At last the train started, and my reverie was broken by a pleasant voice: "Ticket, sir!"

I fumbled in my pocket for the money (I had not bought a ticket), and, looking up, handed it to the conductor. One glimpse of that face was enough.

"What! Bob Loomis, as sure as I have eyes!"

"The same, sir; well, well, I am glad ter see you. S'pose you are goin' to give the village a little visit. Bin a long time since you war there."

"Seven years, at least. And so you 're on the railroad, Bob?"

"Yes, I have a steddy job now, as you see. It 's only lately that I got to conductin'. I war brakin' fur the last four years, but when Andy Pike got promotid ter the passenger, they give me this local."

"Tell me, Bob, I can not wait; I want to know all about the village."

"Well, sir, you 'll see a great change. I tell you, nobody ever speaks of Risin' Branch as a godless town now; yet it is as flourishin' a place as lies along the road."

"So the white church has done a great work?"

"Yes, it has; and the mem 'ry of Uncle Joe Sales and his wife will never die while church spires pint ter heavin."

"Of course old Aunt Samantha is dead?"

"Long ago; the old folks are both sleepin' side o' their children at Craggy Hill."

"Craggy Hill?"

"Yes; you see, they keep the graveyard there yet, but the old log meetin'-house has been gone this many a day."

"But what of Mr. Sarcott—did he ever join the church?"

"Oh, yes," answered Bob; "he did, and he lives in the village in a little cottage—all that was saved of his big property. His old housekeeper, Mary, is still with him. Nobody else could understand his ways. He would never become an officer of the church. 'Let me sit furever in the lowest seat,' is all that he will say; but he goes pretty reg'lar. His older children never come home now-a-days; Jinnie, you know, is dead, and Nannie—"

"Oh, yes, what of Nannie?"

"Why, Nannie, she's married to Jake Conway."

"To Jake!"

"Yes; he's our preacher now. If yer stay over to-morrer yer kin have a chance ter hear him. I tell you he is goin' ter be a big man some day."

"Well, Bob, these are surely great changes."

"They are, fur a fact; and, by the way, you remember Dill, the storekeeper?"

"Yes."

"He war killed about a year ago on this road. He went ter Hanaford to live, after Mr. Sarcott broke up, and took ter drinkin' hard. He fell off a train and war run over."

Our conversation was broken by the whistle of the train.

"Here we are," said Bob.

I left the train, Bob promising to see me on the morrow, and took my way toward the main street of the village. It was already dusk, and I went to the house of a friend.

It was with many feelings of wonder and sadness

that I took my way to the white church the next morning. Nestling among the green trees a little to the left of the village, it seemed to me like a white dove that had flown down from heaven with a message of peace.

The seats were all full, and in spite of his hair now snowy white, I recognized near the pulpit the bowed form of Mr. Sarcott.

Jake had changed less than I expected. He was more manly in appearance though, and a curly-headed little woman who sat in one of the side seats seemed to regard him with extraordinary interest.

I tried to listen to the sermon that fell from his lips, but in vain. I could not chase a multitude of intruding thoughts from my mind. I thought of Mr. Sarcott's fortune, now vanished like mist. I thought of the bright hopes that had been blasted in the little village. I thought of Eurilda, whose mother, dressed in deep black, sat in the seat with Nannie. My eyes followed the long line of railway plainly visible from the church window. I thought how the project in the hands of Mr. Sarcott had been so utterly defeated; then I thought how, in spite of all opposing forces, the little chapel had arisen here. The last words of the sermon fell distinctly on my ear. It seemed as if they had been framed expressly as a fitting conclusion to my own thoughts. I had heard nothing else but them: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand forever."

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